

Palm Sunday
April 5, 2020

From the front pew of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL
Matthew 21:1-11
Matt Matthews

Here in Champaign we are soon getting a Costco—one of these big food warehouses. I've been to Costco before. Once at a Costco, there was a large container of pimento cheese—maybe five pounds, or, maybe, five hundred pounds. It was big. I could have fed this whole congregation—and I know how much you all like cheese.

I asked an employee, "Do you sell this pimento cheese in a smaller container?"

It seemed a legitimate question to me. I thought I was making a sane inquiry. It seemed perfectly reasonable.

But the employee was literally taken aback. He literally backed up as if to take a wider look at me, as if to see me from head to toe, as if to say *are you for real?*

I was asking about cheese, and here I was getting the third degree. I'll never forget what he told me. This is what he said, verbatim: "This is Costco. Go big, or go home."

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Go big, or go home. This says a lot not only about the Costco culture and business plan—which I'm not complaining about. There is value in saving money by buying in volume. But this "go big or go home" notion says a lot about our wider culture. Go big, or go home.

We like big. Big means we've succeeded. Big garners respect. We measure our fish when we catch them and the biggest catch gets the prize. In our culture, size gets the prize. Go big, or go home.

We like the Big Win, being the fastest, the richest, the smartest, the bestest, having the most, being king of the mountain.

The son of the Most High, the King of the Cosmos understands our grappling and groping for The Big. People then as people now were probably into bigness, winning, being first, best, most. Jesus, in the gospels, gives us every reason to believe that he understands the world's culture. And here as he enters Jerusalem insofar as he is able, **he decidedly does the opposite of going big.**

Yes, it's a parade. A big parade. And there is a crowd. A large crowd. They are most certainly making a big deal out of Jesus. They are shouting. They are whooping it up. They are waving branches in the air. They are spreading coats on the ground. They are making big show, having a big time, and probably expecting big things.

For his part, Jesus is at the center of the shouts, the center of the holy commotion, the center of this short-lived adoration. There's no denying the spotlight is fixed on him. And for the moment he's the big, big star. But he's not using the spotlight to make a show. He could be pumping his fists, and making a political speech. He could be convening a rag tag army that would throw the Romans out of Palestine. (That's what many may have been expecting. We will later believe that's what Judas, the zealot, may have wanted.)

But he is not showing out. He is not pumping his fists, not pounding his chest, not grabbing the microphone, not tooting his own horn, not recruiting an army.

He has chosen to ride a donkey and the colt of a donkey. Couldn't he have gotten a steed? Or a chariot, with all the modern chariot-features, cup holders, safety features, mag wheels. Couldn't he have arranged a guarded escort? Probably. And couldn't they have carried spears instead of palm branches? I suppose.

But he doesn't. He's doesn't wear a crown. He hasn't secured a guarded escort. And he's riding the Chevy Chevette of animals: a donkey.

LOOK:

Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

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Throughout Matthew's gospel Jesus has been pointing out the underdogs, the underserved, the underbelly of the populace. The blessed poor, and meek, and reviled. The lame, the blind, the lepers, who along with women and children are relegated to the fringe of society. Jesus uncannily and often makes them the focus of his ministry.

So much for "Go big, or go home."

He himself descends from a lineage that makes clear mention of some less-than-stellar ancestors: a foreigner, a woman of possible ill repute, to name two. And he launches into life as a refugee, on the run from a dangerous government.

And so, when the son of the Most-High God comes to Jerusalem, he's not in a Rolls Royce but in a grocery cart.

Jesus (in chapter 20) had told his disciples: "You know the leaders of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones among them are tyrants. **It will not be so with you.** Anyone who wishes to be great among you will be your servant. Anyone who wishes to be first among you must be your slave. Just as the son of man didn't come to be served, but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many."

How are you putting others first? How are you learning to humbly serve? We have the perfect example in Jesus.

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humble, and mounted on a donkey"