

We hear from a new prophet this week, but the words should sound familiar. “Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” As Christians these words take us to Palm Sunday and herald Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem.

Zechariah’s announcement is of the coming of the Davidic king as part of the development of messianic expectation in Judaism, though, the description of the coming king could be a description of Jesus. He rules with righteousness and justice. He rules with God’s help and doesn’t rely on his own strength. He is gentle, or humble, not proud or boastful. He rides a donkey, not a war horse which announces the end of war and the beginning of a universal peace under his rule.

Zechariah’s is a message of hope and restoration, and it is embodied in Jesus. In following the image set by the prophet, Jesus enacts this vision, saying much about God, who has been faithful from the beginning, whose plan is one of love and reconciliation. This will be Jesus’ message as he proclaims the kingdom of God.

While the prophet’s message calls the Israelites to a new understanding, it also calls us to our own discipleship, one where we learn from and follow Jesus. As we have heard previously, this call is not to be taken lightly, it comes with a cost. But it is a call to new life, filled with hope and promise, and Jesus will be with us every step of the way.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” These are familiar words, too, and are words of great comfort in times of great need and trouble. We don’t travel through this life alone, Jesus promises. But these words call on us, too, as we can see from the other words of Jesus today.

It sounds like Jesus is more than a little annoyed with the crowd, which can’t seem to make up its mind. John the Baptist comes to pave the way, neither eating or drinking, (remember the locusts – I’m not sure how they count as food) and he is rejected – told to lighten up. Jesus comes and invites them all to eat and drink with him, throws a party as long as everyone is invited, and they wailed about the company he kept and called him a glutton and drunkard.

Both messages are a threat to their autonomy, both call them to rely on someone, something, not of their own making. But the crowd isn’t ready to embrace either John’s clear but stringent commands for repentance or Jesus’ radical inclusiveness. The tune keeps changing, we dance to different pipers, insisting that the middle way, our way, is more palatable than the extraordinary future that God dreams for us and the world. We want forgiveness but not repentance; love but not to be loving. The choice seems to be not to choose – and with that choice, we certainly lose.

St. Paul models the difficulty of choosing what we know to be right. I know what is right, I want to do what is right, but then I don’t. I get in my own way. We all know this struggle. And with discipleship it is kind of like what Jesus described. Two competing visions, both have promise. One has more. But we want our own way and so we redefine, water down, and embrace the

mediocrity of our own brand of discipleship. We take the easy road – or at least the one we think is easy, because, on the surface it seems to cost us less.

Thankfully, Jesus redefines easy. “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Being yoked to Jesus means he helps bear the cost of our true discipleship. Like spiritual infants, we cast all our dependence on our Lord and Savior. Our own autonomy, our rugged individualism, goes out the window, and with it, our struggle. Such is the paradox of this easy yoke.

When we choose to be yoked to Jesus we follow the path he sets before us. He is our messiah, our Lord, and we are called to live faithfully into God’s kingdom which he sets before us even now. Peace rather than war, restoration rather than destruction, love rather than hate.

This is our work, our “burden” and it is motivated by hope. Justice, equality, inclusiveness, unearned and unconditional love, can be our future, one in which all God’s dreams finally come true. We are called to participate, now, in that future, and every choice we make as Christians should be one that aligns itself with that future. This is how we are yoked to Jesus. And as hard as it may seem, this is the easiest choice, because in casting all our reliance and all our hope on Jesus, we become more and more like that which God created us to be, and we do not do this alone.