

Prayer of the Day:

We praise you, O God, for the great acts of love by which you have redeemed us through your Son, Jesus Christ. As he was acclaimed by those who scattered their garments and branches of palm in his path, so may we always hail him as our King and follow him with perfect confidence; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

Verse of the Day:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. (John 12:23 cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

They are coming from the East along the road from Jericho. As they approach Jerusalem, they come first to the villages of Bethany (home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha) and Bethphage. They mark that the steep ascent of over 3,500 feet in the course of the 17 miles is almost over. While Jerusalem is still not visible, hidden on the other side of the mountain, it is close. It is here that Jesus stops for preparations to be made. The disciples will need to get a very specific animal. And while they linger, the message spreads. "Jesus is near, Jerusalem. He is coming over the eastern slope, traveling with the pilgrims who have come for the Passover and the feasts of Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits.

As reach the crest of the Mount of Olives Jerusalem bursts into view. It's a usual location for the joyful sounds of pilgrims to be heard. But today those with Jesus, the group which follows after and the contingent of people who burst forth from Jerusalem to catch a glimpse of Him, rejoice not for the end of the journey, but for the one whose journey nears its end. Cloaks are tossed in the road and palm branches are laid before him, "*Hosanna!*" "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" ¹⁰ "*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!*" "*Hosanna in the highest!*"

We wag our fingers at the people of Israel from time to time don't we? But I have to say, this is one time in the history of the people of God where they got it right, even if it was for the wrong reasons.

Text: Mark 11:1-10

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" ¹⁰ "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"



What are they saying with these words? Well go back several weeks, even months now to the fourth Sunday in Advent. It's on this Sunday that we are reminded of the Old Testament names of the Messiah. They're probably remembered best because of that most well known of Advent hymns, Come O Come Emmanuel. There verses cry for the Root of Jesse, the Key of David, and in a verse not used by our hymnal the King of Nations. As they shout their Hosanna's and words which accompany them, they acknowledge Him as Messiah.

Oh, that's right the people connect the dots, they recall the words of Zechariah and see that Jesus is fulfilling them and they erupt in the cry commonly heard at the approach of kings, taken from the Passover Hallel (Psalm 118) "*Hosanna!*" "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" ¹⁰ "*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!*" "*Hosanna in the highest!*"

Sure, a donkey is no ride for a king but this unbroken creature doesn't kick, run or attempt to throw its rider. Even when surrounded by screaming crowds of rabid fans it remains calm under His touch. He is the fulfillment of scripture, the one long foretold by the prophets, King of kings and Lord of lords. He has driven out demons, cured every disease set before Him, even brought the dead back to life. The miracles alone warrant the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* This one is the fulfillment of scripture, the promised Messiah, the Son of God!

You can almost feel it can't you? As the scriptures are fulfilled and the crowd reaches its full voice, something big is about to take place. Jesus has come to finish what He started. He is coming to fulfill the purpose for which God sent Him!

Of course, this is where Israel so often finds and loses Jesus. The glory is intoxicating. They have often clamored after Him thinking He would rid them of Rome. They were ready to forcefully place Him on the throne when bread and fish miraculously multiplied in the hands of His followers. Even the disciples want to set up shop so as not to leave the glorious sight that overwhelms the eyes on the Mount of Transfiguration.

But the reaction is not surprising, or at least it shouldn't be, because we do it too. We are given a glimpse of the power of the almighty, we hear Him tell us that we are His and that's all it takes for the visions of grandeur to start popping up in our heads. If I'm sick, the great physician will always heal me! If I'm hungry, the bread of life will always feed me! Having established His kingdom, it will be Hosanna's and Alleluia's and never a moment of trouble! And while that day will come, as we stand in the glory and perfection of heaven, Jesus never promised that now, in fact, He promised the opposite.

Oh, it's true, the glory of God must be in Christ! It is absolutely necessary if we are to be saved. His robes must be righteous, holy, pure if we are to be considered so when He places them on us. Yet, we must be careful not to get so hung up on the glory that we crave an earthly throne for our God instead of the one He won in His humility.

Oh, that's right, while glory was certainly evident on this Sunday of Palms, His humility can't be missed either! As we peer at it, we see His purpose come into focus. No flash of armor accompanies Him, nor soldiers bearing shields and swords, but that doesn't mean he hasn't come to do battle. It is interesting to note, that the donkey is the common animal of burden bearing and so often as we page through the sacrifices of animals and the creatures used in service of God, they were to be new, unbroken, unriden creatures.

Consider also cry of the people! “Hosanna!” Literally means “save now!” Save from what? Save how? While they may have thought it more as “hail” or save us from political oppression and earthly calamity, what fitting words are on their lips.

As we peer at the humility of this triumphal entry, the words of our second lesson come to life. ⁵ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:* ⁶ *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,* ⁷ *but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* ⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!*

And so it is that the Son of David, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, picks His ride so specifically. Approaches in such humility. He comes to defeat Sin, Satan and hell and He must give Himself to do it! No flash of armor, no clash of swords, no tremble as armies move across the landscape. Instead, it will be dark, nails will pierce flesh and the earth will tremble as He breathes His last. And this day of Hosannas marks its beginning. Oh, but we know the end don’t we! Sin, Satan and hell will lose. Our debt will be paid. For all the times we have gotten hung up on glory, He will go humbly and rise victoriously. Yes dear friends, as He comes to finish what He started, we are the ones that reap all the benefits. He does this that we might live with Him forever in heaven.

Every year, I find myself marveling at the scene. My heart swells as He is treated as He should be! It sinks as think of the cries to come. Still, today, as the King comes prepared and ready to finish His work, that we might be saved. May we join the triumphant cries of the crowd “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” ¹⁰ “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest!” Amen!