

Sermon - 04/10/2022
Ps 118; Phil 2:5-11; Lu 19:28-40
Palm Sunday

The Gospels reveal to anybody who reads them: A Man, born in Bethlehem, reared in Nazareth, highly motivated to preach and teach and heal His people. In His brief life (about 33 years), He touched as many souls as He could. He became friends with and mentored followers who would continue His work after He was gone, especially twelve disciples. He brought the Good News of love and justice.

How many of us leave it at that?

The New Age cults paint a mural (I have seen this) in which Jesus, Mohammed, Krishna, Ahura Mazda and others are depicted standing together on the same level. This world-view claims that all these are equal – all are exalted teachers. This is lowest common denominator thinking. This thinking belongs to a strictly materialistic mind-set (meaning, that physical proof of phenomena is all that the mind can believe – nothing unseen is believed). We may claim that everybody has the civil right to be **free of** religious faith. Here is the truth: every human who breathes the breath of life is made in the image of the Creator – and is lost until (s)he is gathered into the family of God. That gathering to God, that reconciliation with God is for right now – and for eternity. Our God is unseen – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And yet, God took the radical step of coming into the world in the flesh – as a human being. God's eternal being in flesh.

Let's look at this Palm Sunday parade that took place in Jerusalem.

At the end of this last journey to Jerusalem in human flesh, Jesus and His disciples come to the suburbs of the city. They usually stopped at Bethany. And they did this time as well. The Gospels clearly state that Jesus knew He was traveling to give up His life for the sake of the entire creation. The prophets spoke of it, He Himself spoke of it and the apostles continue to teach the truth afterward.

The Apostle Peter wrote, “. . .you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you. . . “ ([I Peter 1:18-20](#))

Peter says Jesus-followers are “redeemed” – or bought back from the evil one through believing in Him – believing Jesus is who He says He is.

Today's Gospel passage opens as Jesus is telling His disciples to borrow a donkey colt. He doesn't give a general command – any old colt – but describes an animal He can see in His mind's eye. And the disciples bring the donkey to Him.

Jesus knew what the Prophet Zechariah said:

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (9:9) Zechariah wrote in the late 6th c BC (520-518). This humble ride into the city was a tradition for Israelite royalty, to celebrate a king who did not come to conquer, but rather to bring peace.

The people in the crowd get it. They know what to do. They cut palm branches to wave as Jesus makes His way down from the Mount of Olives toward the city. They shout “Hosanna! Here comes the king!” Maybe some are clueless and simply act out the historic tradition. But some have heard Jesus speak, perhaps have even been touched by Him personally and received healing or anointing. There are those who believe Jesus is the long-foretold Messiah of Israel. The palm branch is the symbol of national unity and victory. What you and I see is truly God “found in human form.” (Phil 2:7) Folks are tossing their cloaks in the path of this procession – Jesus on His donkey – accompanied by His disciples – perhaps children joining in the procession – everybody loves a parade! All ages waving palm branches to

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welcome the king. Jesus is the King of the universe.

The scene is joyous – loud – very disturbing to the temple leaders – the Pharisees, scribes and teachers of the law. They're afraid Roman authorities will notice the uproar and come to quell a Jewish uprising with force. The church leaders urge Jesus to silence these enthusiastic supporters of His. Jesus tells them that if the people do not shout praise, then the ancient stones of the city will cry out praise for Messiah. This is no ordinary teacher and preacher of love and justice.

Now, this is not my first Palm Sunday. I know that you do ***not want*** to live out the coming week of distressing events. You may – at least those with fashion sense – know what you will wear next Sunday. We want to come all scrubbed, manicured and dressed up to sing “Christ the Lord is Risen Today!” I know we do.

Stay with me as we drill down on this joyful welcome for the coming King. This honor given to God's only Son is appropriate – this is how the Savior should be celebrated. But there is deep irony in the shouts of the exuberant crowd – today “Hosanna!” Next week, “Crucify Him!”

We call the passage from the Letter to the Philippians a hymn. It can and should be sung. Listen to the words again: *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11 NASB)*

Through this prophetic Scripture we see the truth. By faith we understand that the One who looks like a humble country preacher is the Anointed One – Messiah in Hebrew – Christos in Greek. The events of the week ahead are disturbing and agonizing. Make time to think about – to meditate upon how God takes the poor judgment of people – the injustice of government and institutions – and turns these unfortunate things into the best news ever for all of creation.

Let's share the wonder of our God found in human form – the person of Jesus the Lord. Amen.