

Hosanna!

March 25, 2018

Mark 11:1-10

1 When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 2 and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. 3 If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" 4 They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, 5 some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" 6 They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. 7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. 9 Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Today is Palm Sunday. People often ask "preacher what are you preaching on Sunday?" Well when it is Palm Sunday there is only one topic to preach on - Jesus' magnificent entry into Jerusalem. The challenge is how to tell the same story and keep it interesting, educational, or enlightening. By now, in the Scripture, Jesus is famous. He has a reputation as a healer and is well known in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Even as far off as Galilee some scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem tracked him down to challenge his authority as a healer and teacher. The religious leaders are afraid of his influence. The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders is a battle over who gets to speak the word of God to the people.

Jesus has been planning this trip to Jerusalem all along. Some people even warn him not to go to Jerusalem because there is a plot to kill him that comes from Jerusalem. But Jesus insists he has to go; he has to go to Jerusalem. The story is one that is well familiar to us all. Jesus makes a unique, grand entrance into Jerusalem, the Holy city, the headquarters of the religious establishment.

In writing the story Mark is concise but specific. The King has the right to take any privately owned animal into his service. The action of Jesus in taking the colt demonstrates his right to do so as a royal prerogative. The Scripture is specific, the colt that he obtains has not been ridden on. The significance of this is that no other person can ride on the king's horse. In describing the situation Mark paints a picture of royalty. Mark also uses specific words "the Lord" to identify Jesus. There are several ways to identify Jesus; Lamb of God, Light of the World, Master, Teacher, and some others. In the Scripture reading today, Mark refers to Jesus as "the Lord." This has a very specific meaning. Lord is the most exalted identification of Jesus. Our basic premise, our theological understanding, is that Jesus is Lord. There are also the specific words "needs it." He needs it because riding in on the colt is a deliberate action. The custom is that all pilgrims walk into the holy city. So, while everybody else is walking, Jesus is riding into Jerusalem. This is a highly unusual action and also a royal prerogative.

The disciples demonstrate a royal treatment by putting their garments on the colt. Meanwhile, the people lay their garments on the road as a carpet which is also royal treatment. They cut leafy branches growing in the field and use them with their own garments to cover the road for Jesus to ride on. So, Jesus comes into Jerusalem hailed as a king, the long awaited Messiah, and is given the red carpet treatment of a royal king. To classify it as an enthusiastic

demonstration is using mild language. To describe how they hail Jesus as the Messiah, I have chosen to say "the crowd goes crazy!"

The crowd is large. It has accumulated from what I will refer to as "the Lazarus effect" which comes from the Gospel of John. The crowd witnessed Jesus bring Lazarus back to life. When Jesus heard the news that Lazarus had died he said "it is for God's glory." When Jesus brings Lazarus back to life there is no mistake about it. Everybody knew Lazarus was dead but now he's not dead anymore. This becomes really big news. Everybody is talking about it. So, a large crowd wants to see Lazarus. It got so bad that the religious leaders plot to kill Lazarus too. The crowd testifies that Lazarus lives and Jesus is our hero. This is our long awaited warrior King like David. People have a once in a lifetime chance to see, with their very own eyes, that Lazarus is alive. So, the crowd gets bigger, and bigger, and bigger. The crowd gets so excited they get all worked up into a frenzy. Now virtually everybody wants to see Jesus. So, while the religious leaders plot to kill Jesus, the people acclaim Jesus, praise him, applaud him, and shout it out loud and proud. They shout "Hosanna!" which means save us now. Shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" To shout out like that is a tremendous cry of jubilation. What they are thinking is "save us Jesus, help us now, free us from the Romans."

There is great excitement in the air. The crowd focuses on Jesus as God's hope for salvation. They are prepared to witness the one who will liberate the people. They know God's anointed king enters Zion to establish peace. True peace like that which is promised and shaped by prophecy. They see their hope for justice and salvation. But the crowd is unreliable. The joyous expectation for God's salvation leaves him hanging on the cross. This shows us something today. What we learn from the crowd is that this joyous crowd of expectation will leave him hanging on the cross. This shows us that faith is not built on hope and disappointment. If you don't learn anything else I hope you learn that faith is not built on hope & disappointment. So many times I run into this in ministry. People get disappointed and ask why. But let's face it, life is full of disappointments. God never promises you will not have disappointments. People want to see the power of God but they are not prepared to see that it comes on the cross.