

Scripture:

Psalm 118

Matthew 21:1-11

“The whole city was stirred.”

“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.””

This is the scene for Palm Sunday.

It’s ---- “When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred...”

Emotions run high as Jesus enters into Jerusalem at the time of the Passover
---- some people are perturbed ---- others disturbed ---- some are dismayed --
-- shocked --- confused.

Others still --- are delighted --- excited ---- relieved --- put at ease ---- moved
--- and there were many other emotions as well --- no doubt.

Delighted ----- some people were delighted because the Saviour was finally
arriving.

Others were delighted because they knew that Jesus was never going to
leave Jerusalem this time ---- and that He was finally going to be killed
there.

Others were perturbed --- not sure what to make of this prophet from
Nazareth in Galilee ----- “Who is this?” ---- they ask as verse 10 from
Matthew’s gospel says.

Others were moved to do what would be done when any kind of Royalty or
person of distinction came into town ---- a parade procession --- a donkey ---
- shouts of praise and adulation and adoration --- branches waving in the air
---- cloaks thrown on the ground --- a kind of red carpet.

Still other must have had a sense of relief ---- “Finally our King is coming! -
-- at last we’ll be freed from Roman rule.”

“The whole city was stirred...”

But even this doesn't describe all that happening ---- it doesn't catch the gravity and severity of all that was happening that day.

And neither do the shouts of praise or the donkey or colt ---- or the waving of palm branches --- or the laying down of cloaks.

And none of these catch the gravity of what is happening precisely because they are human responses --- and human actions ---- and human emotions trying to define and celebrate and come to terms with something cosmic and divine.

The root of the word that is translated in the NIV as “stirred” --- actually means something more akin to what happens at an earthquake --- a kind of shaking and rumbling ----- something not caused by human hands.

In other words as Jesus enters into Jerusalem for the very last time --- the ground shook --- the earth rumbled and trembled ---- things were shaking.

God was shaking things up.

Parade yes --- cloaks on the ground yes --- shouts of praise yes ----- waving of Palm branches yes.

Questions like ---- “Who is this?”

Answers like --- “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” --- were certainly part of the day --- were certainly even a big part of the day.

But the shaking of the foundations of the earth --- the action of God ---- the hands of God at work shaping the day ---- are what truly define it.

It's symbolic --- the entry --- the waving --- the shouting ---- the placement of cloaks --- the donkey and so on.

And the earth shaking is symbolic too --- in fact the earth shaking --- trembling --- was by far the most symbolic act that day.

When things happen in life that we cannot easily explain or understand --- we can either choose to become unsettled and anxious ----- uncertain and uneasy ---- or we can choose to sink into a deeper trust in God --- recognizing that He is present and in control.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem ----- was most certainly a life event --- a world event --- that people couldn't really explain or understand --- except to accept that God was at work.

This next week ---- beginning today with Palm Sunday ----- is unquestionably the most important week in the life of the Church.

Holy week --- today until next Saturday --- Palm Sunday ---- Maundy Thursday --- Good Friday ---- Holy Saturday.

More happens in this week than any other 7 day period in the life of the church.

And of course the follow up is pretty big too ----- Easter day kicking off the season of Easter.

But for now Holy Week --- the week leading up to Easter.

And even more specific for today --- Palm Sunday --- the first day of Holy Week.

The earth was shaking --- the foundations were rumbling ---- the tectonic plates --- the lithosphere was reverberating ----- God was at work from the core ----- deep below ---- and also just below the surface.

Imagine a heightened scene ----- perhaps the scene of a disaster --- or an accident ----- often there are shouts and cries --- there is more going on than any one person could possibly ever take in all at once.

Recounts of these kinds of events differ radically from person to person.

Memories are intense and often radically different.

One person remembers how it smelt.

Another how it sounded.

Another remembers how it sounded but heard different sounds than another who also remembered how it sounded.

Some remember what happened with their eyes --- certain images become branded in their mind.

Other felt things --- with their feet or hands --- or arms and so on.

And sometimes in the middle of these kinds of scenes or events people will describe feeling a profound sense of calm --- and honing in on one single thing --- a voice --- a scent ---- an image --- a person --- a place or a specific thing at the scene --- and so on.

People remember ---- and people try to make sense of heightened events in various ways.

As we recreate what it might have felt like to be in Jerusalem that day ----- as Jesus entered into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey --- take just a moment to consider the often overlooked detail ---- the earth shaking and rumbling beneath your feet.

The trembling and shaking --- groaning ---- of the earth beneath your sandaled feet.

God piped in on things ---- shaking the ground ---- as people shouted and praised and waved branches and laid cloaks.

There was whole range of human emotions --- matched by a whole range of human actions on that day.

But perhaps the best way to remember God marching towards the cross of sacrifice and saving love ----- servanthood --- submission ----- is to highlight the shaking of the foundations of the earth.

We weren't there --- we don't know exactly what it was like.

But we do kind of recreate it a bit each year --- with palm branches and shouts of praise --- and scripture readings that recount the event.

If I could recreate the day they way I wanted ----- I would have our whole church just a shaking today ----- the boards creaking ----- the ground below us trembling --- shaking things up a bit.

The reality of Palm Sunday --- indeed every Sunday ---- our lives as a whole ---- is that God is the primary mover.

Our reactions to God are secondary ----- the palm branches and the parade are secondary to the very action of God marching into Jerusalem to save us.

Palm Sunday is about a divine movement far below the branches --- shouts and cloaks on the road.

“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred...”

All of these things ----- the waving of branches --- the shouts of praise ---- the cloaks on the road ----- as important as they are ----- find their origin in something more than just the need to celebrate and mark a special occasion.

They are a response to something far bigger and far more powerful and far more beautiful than any kind of human need.

They come from a profound divine action of love.

Christ coming in ----- Christ shaking the very ground that they walk on --- Christ stirring up the city ----- Christ stirring up their hearts is born out of God’s initiative to rescue His creation from Satan and darkness.

Kathleen Norris --- a contemporary writer and theologian describes today this way ----- she writes --- “Palm Sunday reminds us that our world can turn on a dime ---- that sudden changes in our circumstances can take us straight from praise to lament.”

“Palm Sunday reminds us that our world can turn on a dime ---- that sudden changes in our circumstances can take us straight from praise to lament.” --- and of course things can change suddenly.

The people are shouting and praising and dancing and singing and waving palm branches and laying down their cloaks on the road --- it's a celebration.

Hooray!

Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

All of these great and joyous shouts of praise ---- suddenly turn on a dime.

Hooray!

Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Very quickly --- less than a week later ---- turn to ---- "Crucify him! ---- Crucify him! ---- Crucify him!"

"Palm Sunday reminds us that our world can turn on a dime ---- that sudden changes in our circumstances can take us straight from praise to lament."

The praise of Palm Sunday very quickly becomes the lament of Good Friday.

And the sudden change of circumstances ---- riding on a donkey --- to hanging on a cross ---- also takes us straight from praise to lament.

Kathleen Norris is on to something when she says ---- Palm Sunday reminds us that that our world can change on a dime.

"When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred..."

And that stirring would continue on through the week --- Maundy Thursday the last supper ---- Good Friday the cross ----- and then into the next week as well ---- Easter Day the empty tomb.

This great chapter ---- the Palm Sunday ---- Maundy Thursday ---- Good Friday --- Holy Saturday --- Easter Day chapter ---- is the definitive chapter in the story of God.

These 8 days --- Palm Sunday to Easter Day ----- changed the world.

“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred...” --- and not just for that day but for that day ---- years --- decades ---- and still centuries later the world over ---- every single year at this time ----- Jerusalem --- and hearts all over the world are stirred ----- as we are evidence of today gathering in His name.

Holy Week ---- more than any other week ---- demands our attention.

It’s an emotional roller coaster ----- it’s God stirring things within us.

“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred...”

The ground was shaking ---- the foundations were rocking ----- teetering.

There was a great rumbling and shaking deep below the surface.

God was stirring things up ----- making the very ground fertile for what was about to happen.

God was kneading the dough ----- as Jesus entered into Jerusalem.

He was working out the final details of salvation --- sacrifice ---- and suffering.

Far beneath human understanding ---- God was at work.

“Palm Sunday reminds us that our world can turn on a dime ---- that sudden changes in our circumstances can take us straight from praise to lament.”

Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven! ---- are the sounds of Palm Sunday.

Figs and olives --- bread and cheese and wine ----- are the scents of Palm Sunday.

Palm branches --- a donkey ----- crowds of people ---- cloaks on the ground -
-- a parade ---- a procession ----- are the sights of Palm Sunday.

Tremors.

The earth just a shaking away ---- gently ---- subdued ---- grumbling and
stirring below or feet ----- are the sensations of Palm Sunday.

Palm Sunday is a wake up call for what is about to happen ---- Christ
crucified.

Hooray!

Hosanna!

Save us!

Blessed is he who comes in the name Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Quickly turn to Crucify him! ---- Crucify him! ----- Crucify him!

“And the whole city was stirred!”

This is a most unsettling of days.

Majesty yes ---- but travesty too.

Our hearts are meant to be stirred today --- with this beautiful and also sad paradox of a reception that Jesus gets.

It's celebratory but it's also profoundly sad --- inadequate.

The whole city was stirred.

The ground shook.

Something huge was about to happen.

And so we enter into Holy Week --- the week that culminates at the cross.

And so we enter into Holy Week ----- a week that includes servanthood ----- suffering --- and sacrifice --- the week that ends with salvation.

God is so mightily at work in His creation --- today just as he was when Jesus walked the earth.

Holy Week is the great reminder that when God acts things follow His lead.

“When Jesus entered Jerusalem --- the whole city was stirred.”

Amen.