

March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Palm Sunday

Scripture:

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29

Mark 11:1-11

“A strange entry.”

Anyway you look at it Jesus' entry into Jerusalem today in Mark's Gospel is a bit of a challenge.

It's often referred to as Jesus' triumphant entry.

In the NIV the heading for the passage reads ---- Jesus comes to Jerusalem as King.

And year after year Christian Churches --- including us ----- mark this Sunday with shouts of celebration --- and waving of palm branches.

And rightly so ---- it has a mark of celebration about it ----- waving branches --- shouts of joy ---- songs of majesty --- shouts of Hosanna --- and so on --- these are the things described to us in the scriptures.

But a closer look also gives us a glimpse into the troubling aspects of this entry as well.

I wonder how Jesus felt as He rode into Jerusalem on the colt over the cloaks --- over the palm branches amidst the shouts --- I wonder how He felt.

At the very end of our passage we have a scene in stark contrast to the rest of the preceding verses.

Verse 11 from Mark's Gospel today reads --- “Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

After all the shouts of praise and adoration ----- “Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

Just prior to this ---- beginning in verse 8 ----- it's -----

“Many people spread their cloaks on the road --- while others spread branches they had cut in the fields”.

And -----

“Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted --- “Hosanna --- Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” ---- and “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

And just before this ---- we also have Jesus meticulously describing how His disciples are to go and get a colt for Him to ride in on --- verse 2 to 6 are all about the details of getting the right colt and how it will go and what is to be said.

There is much ado about the preparations for the entry and there is much ado about the entry ---- and then it ends with ---- but it was late so Jesus turned around and went away only to return the next day ---- only this time minus all the fanfare.

It's almost as if there is all this fanfare ---- large crowds laying down their coats --- waving Palm branches --- shouts of joy and praise and Hosanna ---- - and then Jesus walks in --- takes a look around --- and walks back out again.

I wonder how Jesus felt as he rode into Jerusalem.

“Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.” --- that's verse 11 today ---- that's Jesus response to the triumphant entry.

Big jubilant ---- celebratory entry --- and then immediately following this --- - a kind of silent slinking out --- “but since it was already late ---- he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

And then to make it even stranger ---- Jesus comes back the next day ---- and there is no fan fare --- no special notice of Him --- the next day --- it's the same Jesus who comes to Jerusalem only this time nobody even notices Him.

Picking it up at verse 12 --- just after our passage for today in Mark's Gospel  
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“The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it.

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves...”

The next day --- Jesus curses a fig tree ---- and then after that He enters into Jerusalem --- and not only do they not even notice Him --- the same person who one day earlier they spread cloaks for and waved branches and shouted Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord ----- not only do they not even notice Him but this day ---- but He drives some of them out --- overturning tables and scattering coins.

And not only this but to make it even more challenging and strange ----- the very same people who shouted --- “Hosanna” --- and spread their cloaks and waved palm branches one day --- and then didn't even notice Him the next day when he walked into the city again ---- will ---- in just 4 more days ----- shout kill him ---- kill him --- or crucify him crucify him.

It is a very strange scene ----- the entrance that Jesus makes into Jerusalem -- - during His last week ----- as recounted in Mark's gospel today.

He comes in with great acclaim and praise and fan fare --- and joy and excitement.

Minutes later He simply turns around and says it's late let's go home --- and walks out of the city with His followers.

The next day He returns again --- curses a tree that has no fruit when He is famished --- then He goes and turns over table and drives people out --- hollering at them for their poor decisions and behaviours.

And then the crowds turn on him 4 days later and shout kill him ----- kill him --- crucify him --- crucify him.

Anyway you look at it ----- it is a very strange sequence of events --- a very challenging scene.

The crowds wanted Jesus to be a certain way --- a certain kind of king --- a certain kind of Messiah and when He didn't turn out to be the kind of king and Messiah they wanted they wanted nothing more to do with Him --- the leaders --- chief priests and teachers ---- wanted the Messiah to be a certain way --- a certain kind of Messiah and when Jesus didn't fit the mold ----- the wanted Him dead.

Just past our passage for today we read ----- Mark 11 verse 18 ---“The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this --- what Jesus said --- His teachings --- and began looking for a way to kill him...”

I find it amazing that when they didn't like what Jesus was teaching they simply wanted to get rid of Him --- and not just the leaders but the crowds too ---- remember --- and you can find this in Mark 15 ---- remember when Pilate gives the people an opportunity to release Jesus saying ---- “What crime has he committed --- why should we crucify him?” --- the people ----- and I quote Mark 15 verse 14 ----- “But they shouted all the louder” ---- “Crucify him.”

These same people who just 5 days earlier threw their coats down before Him --- and waved branches and ----- shouted --- “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” ----- now shout --- and ---- “all the louder” --- “Crucify him.”

What happened that they went from --- “Hosanna!” --- to --- “Crucify Him.”

What happened that one day it's --- “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” ----- and then less than a week later ---- it's “Kill him --- crucify him --- crucify him”?

And you can argue that with the benefit of hind sight we know how it all is going to turn out --- that it was all a part of God's plan ---- which of course is true.

But I still find it a bit disturbing.

How did they so quickly go from --- “Hosanna!” --- to ----- “Crucify him.”?

Anglican priest and theologian ---- the Rev. Fleming Rutledge ---- tells the story of the young acolyte ----- an acolyte --- an assistant to the priest ----- who about to process into the church on Palm Sunday ---- turns to her at the last moment and says ----- Rev. Rutledge ---- “I don’t understand what I’m supposed to be feeling.”

Rev. Rutledge ---- “I don’t understand what I’m supposed to be feeling.”

In that instant I think the young man captures the ambivalence of the day in a powerful honest and authentic way.

That response to me ---- “I don’t understand what I’m supposed to be feeling.” --- is powerful --- is an authentic genuine response to the drama of the day instead of just mindlessly floating along ---- or carelessly jumping on to the conveyor belt.

It’s O.K. to come to Palm Sunday saying something like ----- “I don’t understand what I’m supposed to be feeling.”

Are we supposed to be delighted that Jesus is coming into Jerusalem to save us from sin ---- granting us eternal life ----- glorifying God as He is lifted up on the cross ---- and then further glorifying God as He walks out of the empty tomb?

For sure we can and do feel that way --- some of us.

Are we supposed to feel sad --- or hurt --- or disappointed as He is betrayed by a fickle crowd who shout “Hosanna Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” ----- one day and then quickly turn on Him and shout louder still ---- crucify him --- crucify him ----- just 4 days later?

For sure we can and do feel this way ---- some of us.

The answer is yes --- we can feel great about Palm Sunday and we can feel terrible about Palm Sunday ----- and of course we can feel somewhere between great and terrible too --- depending on where we are on our walk with the Lord.

I've heard people share all kinds of emotions as they enter into holy Week --  
 ---- happy sad --- delighted --- deeply troubled --- elated and deflated -----  
 and all can be honest and true and faithful responses to the Gospel ----God  
 honours our journey when we are authentic and true and he loves it when we  
 worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

I often find myself in a state similar to the young acolyte ---- not exactly sure  
 how I feel ----- yes I'm kind of delighted yes it's Hosanna --- and blessed is  
 he who comes in the name of the Lord ----- but I also know that my heart is  
 just as corrupt as the crowds that hollered crucify him --- crucify him.

On the one hand it's powerful and beautiful and life giving --- life saving ---  
 to know Jesus is coming to be glorified on the cross --- as Jesus said Himself  
 -----in John 12 verse 23 --- we heard it last week ---- "The hour has come for  
 the Son of Man to be glorified."

On the one hand it's beautiful and powerful and awesome to know that Jesus  
 came in His glory to save us from eternal damnation --- from sin.

And so in this sense Palm Sunday is incredible ---- and life giving --- and  
 beautiful.

But then there are the people ---- the people who support and love Him ---  
 and lay down their coats for Him ---- and shout Blessed is he who comes in  
 the name of the Lord ----- but then just 5 days later shout --- him --- oh him  
 ----- kill him ---- crucify him.

The people remind us just how fickle we all can be.

The people remind us just how quickly we too can turn away from God ---  
 away from Jesus.

Palm Sunday is ripe with emotion --- and meaning.

Palm Sunday is ripe with celebration and jubilation.

Palm Sunday is ripe with betrayal.

Palm Sunday is ripe with salvation.

Palm Sunday is ripe with suffering.

Palm Sunday is ripe with love.

Palm Sunday is the last Sunday in Lent ----- one of our last opportunities to reflect and self ---- examine in the beautiful season of Lent.

Palm Sunday kicks off a week where our Lord is subject to unjust suffering - -- betrayal ---- arrest ----- desertion --- crucifixion.

Yes it ends well ---- but that's next week --- and were not there yet.

Almost --- 7 days more --- next Sunday ----- but not yet.

Today we are still called to reflect --- self reflect ---- examine --- self examine ----- today it is still Lent.

On the one hand I love the Hosanna's of Palm Sunday --- it's incredible ---- Jesus coming to Glorify God and be lifted up.

Jesus coming to save us from enslavement to sin --- Jesus granting eternal life to those who believe.

Beautiful ----- good --- true ----- saving ---- and of course so much more --- what Jesus did ---- and does --- goes beyond anyone one way of describing it --- however many adjectives we use they're not enough.

But on the other hand Palm Sunday is also sad and disturbing ----- troubling ----- these same people in less than a week --- go from praising Jesus to shouting ---- and shouting ---- "all the louder" --- as Mark says ---- shouting all the louder --- "Crucify him --- crucify him."

As one commentator said --- "We do Palm Sunday an injustice if we only focus on the "hosannas" for they are fleeting. The fickle crowd will crucify Jesus by weeks end."

The Hosannas are not what is beautiful and exciting and life giving about today ---- because really they are just the fickle and fleeting words of a people who betray Jesus and long to see him dead.

It's God's faithfulness to and with us that gives us great hope.

God does not abandon us in the midst of our suffering.

The people abandon Jesus --- God doesn't.

The people turn on Jesus --- praise Him one day --- want rid of Him --- want Him killed the next.

But God doesn't turn on Him.

Our ultimate hope and lasting vindication --- our salvation rests in God.

Jesus' destiny --- His purpose ---- didn't rest in the hands of the people who shouted Hosanna.

Jesus' destiny --- His divine purpose --- also didn't rest in the hands of the people who shouted ----- get rid of Him --- Kill Him --- Crucify Him --- crucify Him.

Jesus' purpose ---- the reason God sent Him ---- rested with God.

God's glory --- God's great and saving plan for the whole of His creation including each and every one of us here today.

In the end the Hosanna's of Palm Sunday mean about as much as the Crucify Him's of Good Friday.

Our ultimate hope --- our vindication --- our salvation don't rest in the shouts of some fickle crowd --- shouting "Hosanna" ---- one day and --- "Crucify Him" ---- the next ---- a few days later.

Our hope --- our vindication --- our salvation ----- rests in God's hands.

God's loving benevolent --- saving hands ----- that is the great comfort ---- and saving love of the Gospel.

As Jesus rides humbly into Jerusalem ---- He does so placing His trust not in the hands of the fickle crowd ----- who one day shout Hosanna and the next



shout Crucify Him ----- as Jesus rides into Jerusalem He puts all His trust in God.

Placing our trust in God means that we give ourselves over into His safekeeping.

The safekeeping that far exceeds any earthly powers that try to thwart it.

Earthly powers tried to thwart Jesus but because He trusted in God ---- He was vindicated --- God was glorified ---- and we are saved.

God is the central actor.

Thankfully the crowds ---- fickle as they are ----- are not the centre of Palm Sunday.

God is.

And God is our hope.

And God is good.

And God loves us and God saves us.

It's the man on the colt that matters today --- not the crowds --- not the words of the crowds ---- the man ---- Jesus --- on the colt.

The great and powerful truth of Palm Sunday is that in the end the shouts of "Hosanna's" --- and the shouts of "Crucify him" ---- that come out of the very same mouths ----- mean very little.

The great and powerful truth of Palm Sunday ----- is that it is God's actions and God's Words --- and God's will ----- and God's saving love that matter.

God isn't fickle --- God doesn't turn His back on us or change His ways or shout our praises one day ----- and then throw us under the bus the next.

God sees through and past our foibles ----- and into a far deeper reality ----- and He saves and He vindicates --- and He reconciles --- and He redeems.

And that is the Good News of Palm Sunday.

God --- ever faithful --- ever good ----- ever saving --- loving --- reconciling --- and redeeming vindicates us and saves us ---- despite our foolishness and despite our fickleness --- and despite our foibles.

It's the man on the colt that matters ----- Jesus.

Not what people said about Him --- not how they treated Him --- not what they thought about Him --- but who He was and is ---- and what He did and does.

God is good.

God is great.

He never abandons us or forsakes us.

He redeems our brokenness and our sinfulness and He has the very last word.

And the last Word is life.

And the last Word is resurrection.

We can choose to listen to the crowds --- we can choose to join in with the shouts of the crowds ---- or we can look past all of that and see the man on the colt ---- Jesus --- and place our trust in Him as He glorifies God ---- and as He saves us.

We who place our trust in God though we may not always understand things ----- will one day be vindicated.

God understands suffering --- God understands that following Him will sometimes lead to suffering --- God knows the world is broken and foolish.

In the midst of our brokenness and our sinfulness God comes and stands among us and in the midst of our brokenness and our sinfulness God has the very last Word.

And the Word is light --- and the Word is life.

And the Word is Christ Jesus our Lord.

And it is all good.

Praise and glory  
and wisdom and thanks and honour  
and power and strength  
Be to our God forever and ever.

Amen.