

Sermon Text for April 13, 2025 – Palm Sunday

By: Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 8 and Matthew 21:1-17 ***“Out of the mouth of babes”***

A week ago Saturday there were 34 of us from the extended Bronkema family who gathered in Penney Farms Florida to celebrate my mom’s 90th birthday. You were directly involved with Pam Johnson putting together the table decorations and Nicole helping to format about 60 pictures of my mom from over her life. She had told us about a decade ago that she didn’t want to have birthday parties except when she turned 90, and so we were able to go all out. All of my brothers were there, all of our children, so my three daughters and their 7 cousins, 10 in all, all of my mom’s siblings were there and they are all living, some of their children, my cousins were there.

It was a great celebration and it pretty much went off without a hitch. My family has been a mainstay at Penney Farms retirement community since 1974. The first place we visited when I came to the United States in 1976 was Penney Farms where my grandmother lived, my mom’s mom. My mom and dad moved there when my mom was 60, so 30 years ago after my dad was diagnosed with Alzheimers. We have a lot of memories associated with the place that JC Penney created for church workers, missionaries and pastors, for his mom and dad, since his dad was a Baptist pastor.

There are certain Sundays that are on our calendar as Sundays that we look forward to and Sundays that are significant and considered markers in our Christian faith. Palm Sunday is one of those Sundays. I’m guessing that we all have memories associated with Palm Sunday either with the Palms or the music or the celebration that is part and parcel of this Sunday. It is a celebration, but it has some pretty powerful undertones that remind us that we are on the cusp of Holy Week, we are right on the edge of the passion of Jesus.

Lent, these days that we have been going through together, and Easter itself and so by default Palm Sunday as well, is about not having the cup that we want, but rather drinking, often against our will, the cup that the Lord has given us. That is a difficult lesson to learn in the midst of a celebration and in the midst of a life that is already filled with questions and doubt and hardship. Jesus didn’t want to, he wasn’t looking forward to his suffering and his death but it was necessary.

Today, out of the mouth of babes, out of the mouth of children, we see the path that Jesus takes as they proclaim that he is the Messiah, just as he is about to step onto the cross, just days before his death. Let's read.

READ

We continue along in our Gospel of righteousness always looking for opportunities to bring to the forefront ways in which God is calling us to act according to his will, even if it is the most difficult thing we can think of. Jesus enters Jerusalem today after this long buildup that we have been following in Matthew. He has been making his way from Galilee, made his way through Jericho, and now he finds himself on the outskirts of Jerusalem, his destination, along with thousands of other pilgrims getting ready to enter Jerusalem. You need to know that this scene is not unique to Jesus. There were thousands lining the streets to get into the city. We often think of this scene as Jesus is the only one riding into Jerusalem and so people are noticing him. We don't see that until vs.10 where we see that the entire city is shaken, the word used here is the same for earthquake, as he enters the city.

The function of Jesus' ride into Jerusalem is to show the world his royal status. This was a symbolic ride into Jerusalem so that he could fulfill Scripture as the Messiah and the Lord. Hardly anyone noticed him above the others that were coming in. Our first reading this morning, Psalm 8, speaks about all that the Lord has created and made and gave to us not as a possession but as something over which we are to take care. We used this reading because it is the one that Jesus quotes in regards to him being the Messiah and children being the ones who proclaim it. But the Psalm uplifts the kingdom of God as being the handiwork of God and our role is very clear, we do not possess this world and all that is in it.

Jesus as Lord, Jesus as King, Jesus is the one who has the power and the dominion over all things. This is a fairly typical three point sermon and the first point is this one. It follows the flow of this Scripture where we see Jesus ride into Jerusalem, then Jesus cleans out the temple, and then Jesus heals and addresses the church leaders about the children lifting up the truth of who Jesus is. So our first point is that on Palm Sunday we are reminded that Jesus is Lord. We are not the Lord's of anything, Jesus is Lord and our lives ought to reflect the Lordship of Jesus.

What is the first thing that Jesus does once he gets off his donkey, or his donkey and his colt depending on how you read this Scripture. Jerusalem was the destination city, and the temple was the destination location. That is where Jesus went first and we see that as he enters the temple and runs out some of the buyers and the sellers and the money changers and the dove merchants. I used to think that Jesus was mad because they were ripping off the poorest of the

poor in the crooked practices of exchanging money and selling the doves that only the poorest of families would have bought for sacrifices, but no, it was simply the fact that the temple, the house of God, had become a house of commerce.

Keep in mind that this all was taking place in the temple court which was a huge, about 35 acres, so what Jesus was doing in driving out these people, had very, very limited affect. He didn't go all around the courtyard and drive everyone out, but just a certain location to prove his point that the temple was meant to be a house of prayer, a house of worship, not a commerce center.

This is our second point, first point is that we are reminded that Jesus is Lord on Palm Sunday. Also on Palm Sunday we are reminded that worship is the absolute most important thing that we do as a congregation. When we gather together it is for worship and there is nothing more important that we do than to worship. There can be nothing in our life that gets in the way of our worship on Sunday, or distracts us from that worship and leads us in a different direction. If we are currently not prioritizing the role of worship in our lives, then we are like those merchants who have set up shop in the courtyard and completely forgetting that Jesus is Lord, first point, and so as a result he has to be worshipped.

The market outside of the temple represents to Jesus the secularization of the temple by worshippers whose lives do not reflect their religious profession. Do we use our religious, our Christian faith, as a source of security instead of allowing ourselves to be remade by it. Do we define ourselves as followers of Jesus because that is what assuages our conscience, or do we define ourselves as followers because it is the only way in which we know how to live and we understand fully and live into the Lordship of our Savior?

The problem was that those gathered had forgotten the primary significance of the temple as a place of worship as opposed to a commercial center. Jesus enters it and transforms the courtyard from commercial center to a place of healing, as we get to our third point. Palm Sunday gives us insight into what we mean when we say that Jesus is Lord, the king of our lives and our lives ought to reflect that. Worship is at the center of our dedication and love of Jesus and that worship cannot be sullied or distracted from what it was intended to be. Lastly, our way of life is not ours, it is God's to control, and the reference to the children reflects that.

I want you to notice that the entirety of this Scripture does seem to be a bit of a constant stream. Jesus rides into Jerusalem, he cleans out some of the temple by driving the commerce out, he then transitions to healing people who come to him, he then puts the religious leaders straight about the message that the children are giving. It isn't until this very last point that we

see the religious leaders begin to take umbrage at what is going on. There is no push back on when Jesus is riding into Jerusalem and people are calling him the son of David. There is no push back when he drives out the money changers and the sellers and the buyers,

The push back comes when the religious leaders see the children mimicking the words of their parents by calling out to Jesus in the temple, Hosanna, to the son of David. It is then in vs.15 that they become angry that takes us to the third point which is our way of life is not ours, it is the Lord's. So the religious leaders of that day, and of today as well, consider the religious realm to be their realm. They were the ones who dictated what happens when and where in the temple and who says what and they lay down their authority often and heavily.

Children have always been involved in the religious life of the church from the time that they are baptized, to attending with their parents and learning the songs and the prayers and the way in which things are done, and who sits in which pew, to confirmation class and eventually we hope to their marriage and then their kids are baptized and it all happens again. The religious leaders are the ones who dictate how things evolve and how they take place and how they happen. If someone comes along who is outside of that leadership and not connected to the church and tries to shake things up, well, that isn't normally accepted kindly.

But what happens in that scenario is that the religious leaders, and really the church as a whole, forget the words of Psalm 8 that all of creation is the work of God. All that we see is God's possession and not ours. We do not own a single thing on this earth. God can take anything away from us at any time, it is his right, he owns it all. God can also gift us anything that he wants at any time as well. But we forget that, we think that what we have created, our religious life, the way in which we do church, our families and our jobs, all of it, we think this is something that we have done and somehow we have possession over it.

Palm Sunday reminds us that all is God's and we own nothing on this earth. How does this tie in to the children calling out to Jesus and the religious leaders getting angry? Because they thought they had the religious control over the children as well, they were going to teach them how to be a good follower of God and now this person shows up and begins to erode the authority that they thought they had, their singular authority, no one else has it, God has given it to us and us alone.

It is within all of our DNA to think that we possess what we think we have. But we tend the earth for some time on behalf of someone else. We are not owners, we were never meant to be. When I say that some of you may be thinking, well, that's a bummer. Is it really though? God has given us a role and that is to steward His possessions, all things that we think we have

actually we do not own, they belong to the Lord. I'm not just talking about material things, but our families, our children, our time, all of it is God's. For me, that comes as a huge relief as we enter into this Holy Week which can be seen as the most frenetic and busy time in the life of the church. In the midst of busyness this sense of ownership almost becomes overwhelming.

This Palm Sunday be reminded of what it means that Jesus is Lord over all things, that worship is at the heart of who we are as disciples of Jesus, and that we do not possess anything, God is in control and in charge, and thanks be to God for that. Amen.