

Isaiah 50:4-9a and Mark 11:1-10

“The triumphal entry”

Happy Palm Sunday to all of you today. This is arguably one of the most celebratory Sundays next to Easter that we have on our calendar. We even have a phrase that we are given to celebrate today and it is Hosanna, right we shout Hosanna to celebrate the triumphal entry of our Savior Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. Let’s try that out. Hosanna! It goes with the phrase that we are going to say together next week as we proclaim next week He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! What a celebration Palm Sunday is.

This year we find ourselves smack dab in one of the most wonderful times of the year if you are a sports fan as well, arguably the time of year that sports fans enjoy the most than any other time of the year. March Madness, talk about celebration, but also the agony of defeat. There have been multiple last second shots, and tip ins, and mistakes, that we have seen already this year. It has been a great year. At the end of it all they play what culminates as the finale, One shining moment is what it is called, which shows all of the celebration and the agony that the tournament holds.

There are so many unscripted victories in the basketball tournament, but Palm Sunday is meant to be the one shining moment for the disciples, and what we will see, is that it is actually scripted from beginning to end by the star on the court, Jesus himself. On this Palm Sunday, what is arguably the most celebrated day of Jesus’ life during his ministry, we see and feel the excitement as we draw near to it.

Our confirmation kids have a close second to the most celebrated day. Hard to believe that in just a few weeks they will be confirmed, some of them baptized and it is meant to celebrate a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. In the Jewish faith we have the same thing where boys have their bar mitzvah’s and girls their bath mitzvahs. I’ll never forget one of the trips that we took to Israel and we were waiting in line to get into the temple mount and so we were raised up and could see the entrance of the gate and it was that time of year that they were celebrating the bar mitzvahs and you could see a boy of about 12 or so being raised upon shoulders, or on a chair, with a crowd of people surrounding him before and after shouting hosanna and celebrating as they made their way from the gate to the Western Wall. We must have seen a dozen of these entries, celebrations that would not have been dissimilar to what we see on Palm Sunday in the first century.

Today we are going to see Jesus who has all the power and all the authority. Jesus who is able to raise Lazarus from the dead and change water to wine, Jesus who is able to heal the sick and calm the storms, who has all power and authority, choose to be powerless, choose to be a suffering servant. Let's read.

READ

John Calvin says of Palm Sunday that the disciples, although perplexed and puzzled, clearly went and did what was told them. Jesus from verse 1 all the way through 10 knew what had to be done and he orchestrated and choreographed it and did it. The vast majority of this Scripture for Palm Sunday is the lead up to Jesus getting on the donkey and riding in. 8 out of the 10 verses is the lead up. Let's look at that, where do they find themselves and where does Jesus send his two disciples to get the donkey?

They were approaching Jerusalem, which is the final destination, but they were not there yet, they were in Bethany, which is that town on the side of the Mount of Olives at the top of the other side of the valley before you enter into Jerusalem. Who lived in Bethany? We know this town, we have been there in our Scripture before, we have spent some time there? Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus, right? It is here where Mary washes Jesus' feet with perfume. It is here where Jesus spends the last week of his life. Bethany was not Jesus' home town, but he knew it well and the people there knew him well. So when the disciples are equipped with the phrase: The Lord needs it, it should come as no surprise that everyone knew who the Lord was and if he needed it they were going to provide it as we see in vs. 6.

What a powerful phrase for each of us to keep in mind. The Lord needs it. We should have the same familiarity and the same affection for the Lord as the people of Bethany do for Jesus, the one who raised from the dead their favorite son Lazarus. All the disciples had to say was that the Lord has need of it and the people respond to the Lord with gratitude and servitude. What a lesson.

What if this phrase, the Lord has need of it, were directed to us today, as we celebrate the triumphal entry and try to figure out what our status is as disciples of the Savior? I think the phrase the Lord has need of it has to be directed to our work and our fealty to our King Jesus. When we hear God's call for help, the Lord has need of something in your life, how do we respond, do we clench our hands tighter or open them to see how and what will result?

Jesus needs our time, the Lord has need of it, and do we respond with my time is limited? I look out and I see so many of you who are sacrificing so much time for the life and ministry of this church, so those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

Jesus needs our strength, and do we respond with I'm exhausted and I'm worn out from every day life.

Jesus needs our mind and do we respond with I have to give my attention to all that I have going on now, I'm overwhelmed.

The Lord has need of us, and today maybe we should be asking what kind of priority are we giving our king?

So they get the donkey, and potentially the story of Palm Sunday is so familiar to us that we just assume: of course they get a donkey, it is what Palm Sunday is all about. But why is Jesus so intent on ensuring that he has a donkey to ride into Jerusalem? He could have walked, but why a donkey, and one more detail about the donkey, we see that it was never ridden, that sounds like a disaster ready to happen. All of these details are significant and choreographed and fashioned to demonstrate exactly who Jesus is.

The short answer is that Jesus is fulfilling the prophecy that Scripture reflects of the coming King, the Messiah, and he is the one who has come to save his people just as the Bible said from hundreds of years earlier, that he would. Why the donkey? Because we see Scriptures of those chosen by God riding on a donkey victorious. Look at Zechariah 9:9-10, I Kings 1:38, the people spreading their cloaks before him in II Kings 9:12-13. This was meant to be the entry of a king, Jesus' triumphal entry as king.

Jesus' disciples understood it this way. Some call this the Messianic demonstration, that people were all pointing to Jesus as the Messiah as he made his way into Jerusalem. But we know that Jesus' disciples, for them this triumphal entry is put before them even as they have not understood his destiny. Jesus, on the other hand, see Palm Sunday very differently than how his disciples see it. For Jesus this is an entry into suffering and death as he faces the last week of his life.

Today begins for us Passion Week, where we will be having services on Thursday evening for Maundy Thursday, where we take communion together just like Jesus and his disciples would have taken, just a few days removed from this triumphal entry. We will then on

Friday have our tenebre Good Friday service, again, just a few days removed from this one shining moment.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is king, and today we proclaim that and we celebrate that. This triumphal entry ought to demonstrate that he is certainly king of our lives and when he says he has need of it, we joyfully and with a servant heart produce it. There is no other king who can lay a greater foundation for lasting security, economic welfare, and peace than the one that Jesus lays for us. Jesus is the realistic solution to the ruin around us that we call the world. The Jesus who rides in victory toward Jerusalem this morning looks more like the one we have in Isaiah, who is also the Messiah: I gave my back to those who struck me.

On Palm Sunday we move from triumph to death, just as Jesus did. We move from the calls of Hosanna which come from Psalm 118 that mean save us, this one shining moment of losing all rational thinking by throwing our clothes on the road in a sign of clear unmitigated enthusiasm, to recognizing that this triumphal entry always ends with the recognition that the Lord has need of it. The Lord has need of our lives, let's give it to him as servants of the Savior. Amen.