

## Lessons From Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday, the day we celebrate what we call the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. It marks the beginning of Passion Week, the week of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. It is a busy week in the life of Jesus and is told in all four gospels.

Some quick background, Jesus arrived in Bethany 6 days before the feast of Passover. Jewish people would come from all over Israel and the known world to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. Some estimate more than 200,000 people gathered in the city for Passover, including crowds of people from the area of the Galilee where Jesus had done many miraculous signs and wonders. People were staying inside and outside of the city, camping along the roads and wherever they could. Jesus himself stayed at the home of Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. Six weeks earlier, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus came to Jerusalem, aware the Chief Priest and many of the religious leaders were plotting to have him killed. At the least they wanted him arrested before the feast of Passover but they weren't sure how to do it. The crowds wanted to see Jesus and to see Lazarus as well because they had heard about his resurrection from the dead. Many were wondering if Jesus was the Messiah and the Jewish religious leaders for a variety of reasons refused to accept that. Jesus had only confided to his disciples and a few others like the Samaritan woman at the well that he was in fact the Messiah, but now he was publicly albeit symbolically declaring through this carefully orchestrated entrance into Jerusalem that he was the Messiah. He sends disciples ahead to get a donkey and its' colt for him to ride on. We have no record of him riding on anything but a boat, but now he rides on a donkey's colt because it was fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy. **"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."** **Zechariah 9:14** This entrance sent a message to anyone paying attention that Jesus was the Messiah. The cries of the people, **"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!"** **John 12:13**, riding on the colt, all of it fulfilled what had been written by the prophets concerning the coming of the Messiah.

Crowds gather along the road as he descends the Mount of Olives. Some came out of curiosity, hoping to see Jesus and Lazarus, the man who had been raised from the dead. Some came to lend support perhaps, hoping if he was the Messiah he would lead an insurrection to overthrow the hated Romans and restore Jewish control of Israel. The crowd grew, some

spreading their cloaks on the road before him in addition to waving palm branches. In the midst of the celebration and rejoicing, Luke tells us Jesus stopped and wept as he looked over the city of Jerusalem. **“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side...They will not leave one stone on another because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.” Luke 19:41-44** Talk about killing momentum. Jesus had the crowd cheering him on, but he stops to weep knowing destruction would come to the city because they didn’t recognize that God had come to them, offering salvation. (It happened in 70 ACE when the Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem.) Their king was in their midst, God in flesh and yet they failed to recognize it. Even his disciples didn’t quite understand it all. John says, **“At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.” John 12:16**

Jesus descends the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley and Matthew tells us, **“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.’” Matthew 21:10-11**

That’s the gist of what happened on Palm Sunday, but I want to point out a couple of lessons we learn from the events of the day. First, notice **Zion’s King is not like other kings.** There was Messianic significance to what he was doing and how he was riding into the city, but it only made sense to this little group of Jews in the Middle East. “Look! He’s coming in a way that announces he could be the Messiah, the anointed one”, but to the rest of the world, to the Romans that were in power, this looked ridiculous, outdated, archaic. “Those Jews, so out of step with the rest of the modern world.” He came riding on a donkey’s colt, not a big stallion like the Romans or riding in a chariot to show his power. Zechariah’s prophecy described him as gentle, bringing salvation. He wasn’t coming to impress with power or control with a sword, he was coming to bring hope and salvation. John’s quotation of Zechariah reads **“Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion, see your king is coming seated on a donkey’s colt.” John 12:15.** He isn’t coming to use people or subject people, he is coming to save people from their sin.

He speaks the truth, even if it doesn’t please the crowd. He weeps over the city, grieving because they reject God’s truth, His offer of salvation. Standing against those in power, later when he arrived at the temple he overturned the tables of the money changers, reminding

everyone this was to be a house of prayer. Everything about him was different than the world. The people expected a political/military leader. He didn't come to give them what they expected or wanted, he came to give them what they needed and they needed salvation. Redemption. He didn't come to conform to the world or to condemn the world. He came to save the world. He is Zion's king. The world won't understand and even God's people failed to recognize him. He is Zion's king, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but the banner he carries bears the emblem of a cross with a lamb slain upon it. He is not conformed to this world and neither are his followers. We aren't meant to be like this world and neither are we sent to condemn the world, we are sent to announce the good news, a Savior has come to redeem us and save us from our sins. We're meant to show the world what it looks like to live according to his word because we are citizens of his kingdom, servants of Zion's king!

Some of you may have read the opinion piece written by one of USA Today's editors concerning ORU. Students and staff at ORU sign an honor code every year that states certain behaviors are prohibited in Scripture and are to be avoided by members of the ORU community including, "theft, lying, dishonesty, gossip, slander, profanity, crude language, sexual promiscuity, adultery, any homosexual behavior, premarital sex, drunkenness, immodest dress, etc." The editorial refers to those standards as being "wildly out of line with modern society and the basic values of human decency." She refers to ORU's "prejudiced teachings and moral regressiveness" and the "dangers of their religious dogma." I read the article and first was angered by this tirade against my alma mater and my faith. But then I thought, You know what? She's correct. We are "wildly out of line with modern society." She said ORU's values and beliefs were "wholly incompatible" with the NCAA's values of equality and inclusion. Sarah pointed out our values as believers are "holy incompatible" with the values of the world. Our values are out of line with that of modern society and with the culture. They've always been because Zion's king is not like the kings of this world and the followers of Jesus live counter to the culture in which we live. We always have and with God's help we always will. We are citizens of another kingdom. We live by a different standard, a higher standard. This is who we are. Rome didn't get it and neither will the editorial staff of USA Today if they don't know Jesus. Our king isn't like other kings. Our king rides in on a donkey's colt and lays his life down on a cross to redeem a fallen and broken world and then our king is raised from the dead in power and holds the keys to death, hell and the grave. Our king says to be the greatest in the

kingdom we are to be servant of all. Our king says we are to love one another and forgive those who speak against us. Our king says to love even our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, to turn the other cheek when struck, to go the second mile. Yes, we are “wildly out of line with modern society and wholly incompatible” with this world. We are supposed to be! Look at the arrival of our King on Palm Sunday and may it remind us of how different we are, how different we’re to live, that we aren’t conformed to this world, but we’re transformed by Jesus and his redeeming grace! Let’s live like it!

A second lesson we learn from Palm Sunday is **If we don’t praise Him, the rocks will!** As the crowds gathered people began to not only shout “Hosanna” and “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”, but Luke tells us, **“The whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.’ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’ ‘I tell you,’ Jesus replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.’” Luke 19:37-40**

I mentioned among the crowd were people from Galilee, people who had witnessed many of his healing miracles. When it speaks of the crowd of disciples, this is more than just the 12, this could have been many of those who followed him because of the miraculous signs they had witnessed. The Pharisees wanted him to quiet the crowd, rebuking them for essentially offering praise to Jesus but it was a Pentecostal worship service going on. It says they joyfully praised God in loud voices for the miracles they had seen. Can you imagine a blind man who could now see because Jesus healed him being told to hold it down a bit in his praise? Imagine the lame and crippled now healed and running down the road praising Jesus. Imagine the man who was unable to speak now healed, shouting praise to Jesus. That’s who the Pharisees wanted Jesus to rebuke and to quiet. Jesus says, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out. They will give testimony and praise to what is happening here today.

Understand, these people were just coming to believe that Jesus was their Messiah. They had the testimony and witness of miracles and healings and they were praising Jesus for what he had done, but there was a greater revelation coming! They would soon discover him to be the Son of the Living God, the One who died on the cross for them and then rose from the dead. They praised him for what he had done but we have a greater revelation. We know who he is and what he has done. How much more should we be offering our praise? We know he is more than a healer, more than a prophet, more than Israel’s Messiah. We know he is the risen Savior

and Lord, we know he is God the Son, eternal and everlasting, the creator and sustainer of all things. We know who he is and we know what he has done for us. We ought to learn this lesson from Palm Sunday and we ought to be shouting and praising God, not just on Palm Sunday but every day! Don't let a rock or a stone out praise you. We've got a reason to shout!

The last lesson we learn from Palm Sunday: **It's more than Palm Branches, it's surrender.** The people are shouting Hosanna, praising and rejoicing, excited about being with Jesus, but the excitement would wear off, the crowd would disperse, and by the end of the week some that had been in the Palm Sunday crowd may have been in the crowd shouting crucify him. Being a Christian, a disciple, is about more than waving a palm branch, it's about more than thrilling worship or feeling good in a service, it's about truly surrendering your life to Jesus.

After his entrance into the city, some Greeks came to the disciples and asked to see Jesus. Jesus told them the hour had come for him to give his life and then he said, **"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be."** **John 12:26** If you are going to serve him, you'll have to follow him, you'll have to take up your cross, you'll have to go where he goes, even to the point of laying down your life. It's about absolute surrender. It's about obedience. It's about saying yes to Jesus, regardless of the cost. It won't always be palm branches and celebrations, some days will be about sacrifice and the cross. Are you willing to follow him? Are you willing to surrender your life, everything to him? That's what he is calling us to. That's one of the lessons of Palm Sunday. Surrender.

Jesus said, **"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"** **John 12:27-28** Jesus is calling you, calling us, at this moment, this hour, to deny yourself and take up your cross, to follow him. Say yes to his purpose. Say yes to serving Zion's king, regardless of the price or the cost. He may be asking you to do a hard thing. Forgiving that person is a hard thing, surrendering to his will is a hard thing, going that second mile is a hard thing, turning the other cheek is a hard thing, starting over, starting again is a hard thing, but he has called you for this very reason, at this very time. It's not enough to just wave your palm branch, you have to surrender to Jesus, to follow him, to go with him, to serve him, to say yes to him! That's what Palm Sunday is all about! Will you say yes to Jesus today?

I've appreciated the opportunity during these Sundays of Lent to celebrate communion together. During these weeks I've also wanted this to be a reminder that we are part of this larger church, His church worldwide, all of us, online, in person, across denominations, cultures and nations. We are the church, people of faith and together we come to the Lord's table and together we affirm the essential doctrines of our faith according to the Scripture. A couple of Sundays ago we recited the Apostle's Creed. This morning I want us to recite another ancient creed, a product of two church councils between 325 and 381, known as the Nicene Creed. It may not be as familiar to some, but it affirms a deeper, clearer statement of who Jesus is. In this ancient creed once again we declare together, this we believe. Let's read together.

**I believe in One God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.**

**And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy and apostolic church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Thank you Lord for the forgiveness of sins, for the life we receive from you and the grace in which we stand. Thank you that you gave yourself for us as an atoning sacrifice and that if we repent of our sins and believe in you, we can have everlasting life. The bible says you Jesus, came into the world to save sinners. Thank you for saving us and giving us hope. Thank you for the gift of your body and blood, broken and poured out for us. With thankful and surrendered hearts we come to your table in faith.