

Home Service for Palm Service March 24, 2024

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Ride on, King Jesus. Ride with passion and compassion. Ride in triumph and joy. Ride in humility and gentleness. Ride with us as we travel the journey with you.

Call to Worship:

Jesus, you have walked this road with us many times. Guide our steps and keep us close. Inspire our worship with your loving presence and work in our lives, that your Spirit may flow through our lives as we seek to help others walk the journey with you. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

Hosanna! Blessed is Jesus who comes in God's Name! We stand at the gates of our Jerusalem and wave our branches high. We get caught up in the excitement of the parade. Jesus sits astride a donkey, a beast of burden bearing a most precious gift. Let the joy fill your hearts this day as we shout our Hosannas. Praise God for the wondrous ways in which our lives have been touched. Prepare our hearts to worship and celebrate this day! Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

We love parades! We love the excitement, the colors, the noise! Today we celebrate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. His followers have stripped branches from the trees and wave them in the air. They have thrown their cloaks in the path of the donkey that his steps might be cushioned. And the scene is wonderful. But there is a reality here. The reality is that although we wave our branches and shout "Hosanna!", we have not always behaved as disciples. Too often we have wandered from the path of Christ and stumbled along on our own, believing our way to be superior. We have turned from those who have needed help, because it wasn't convenient for us to be of help of service. We have done and said things that are not worthy of disciples. Yet, here we stand, in the parade route, waving our branches. Forgive us, Lord. Help us to turn our lives around and truly serve you. Help us to really mean "Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the Name of

the Lord!" Let Jesus enter our hearts and transform our lives today, for we ask this in his holy name. AMEN.

Words of Assurance:

Know that the Lord is God, and that Christ's face shines upon us even when we turn away from God's brightness. Walk in the light, dear friends.

Read Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

²Let Israel say:
"His love endures forever."

¹⁹Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.

²¹I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

²²The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

²³the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴The LORD has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵LORD, save us!
LORD, grant us success!

²⁶Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you.^[a]

²⁷The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up^[b] to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

²⁹Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

Prayers of the People:

Through the shouts and branches, the Savior rides again into our hearts, our Jerusalems, the places that we have fortified, sometimes against even God's truth and love. Patient God, be with us today as we witness again the entry of Jesus into the holy city. Remind us that our "holy cities", our souls, need to welcome Jesus, truly in celebration and in commitment to his witness to us. We can so easily get caught up in the noise and forget the Savior. We can get so focused on the celebration and colors that we look past the solitary figure on the small donkey. We stand at the gates this day to welcome Jesus. May our welcome of Jesus also be reflected in our welcome of others who come into our midst. Free us from judgment and prejudice, that we may be open to hearing your word through the ministry of Jesus and the disciples. As we have spoken the names of ones who are near and dear to us who need your healing love, O God, help us also to remember that we need a good measure of your grace and mercy. Bring us through this parade into the comfort of your love. Hosanna! Blessed is Jesus! Blessed is He who has come and who continues to come into our lives forever. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Gospel Lesson: Mark 11:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!^[a]"

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”^[b]

¹⁰ “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹ 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.

Message

Palm Sunday, the events of Holy Week would change the normal human understanding of life and death, for mankind here on earth. Jesus knew how the week would end; not with His death, but with His resurrection which changed human life and provided eternal hope.

So on this Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week, Jesus wants His story told. These great events, the Triumphant Entry of Jesus on Palm Sunday, the Holy Supper on Thursday, the Friday Crucifixion, the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, must be told. Those who were gathering on the streets of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday were asking: “Who is this?” They wanted to know. There are still people who want to know. The reason we as Christians exist is to tell Jesus’ story.

The arrival of Jesus on Palm Sunday was about to change the normal understanding of life and death. Jesus had just raised Lazarus from 4 days dead. Soon, very soon, His resurrected body would change normal thoughts about life after death on planet earth.

There was nothing normal about the “parade” in Jerusalem, when Jesus entered the city on a donkey. The visitors to Jerusalem had just witnessed a Roman military parade. Pontius Pilate had also recently entered Jerusalem from his home in Caesarea. His procession was in the Roman style; complete with a display of Rome’s military might. Pilate was perched atop a majestic stallion. He had all the trappings of Roman wealth and prestige. His Roman Officers were in polished armor displaying the banners of captured, vanquished armies.

Pilate’s parade was a proclamation of Rome’s superiority. And it came with an undeniable message directed to the pilgrims who had gathered in the city from near and far for the Passover festivities: “Keep the peace, or we will control you by force!”

Then we have the Palm Sunday Parade with Jesus on a donkey which was totally different, making people to ask: “Who is this?” Nothing would have seemed more unlikely, a Jewish king riding on a donkey. He didn’t look like a king. No crown. No army marching behind. No banners flying in the wind. It’s not hard to imagine the Romans were laughing as they watched the spectacle. A pauper king, riding on

a borrowed donkey, his saddle a makeshift layer of cloaks, attended by an unruly mob whose only weapons were palm branches.

This little donkey was part of the great plan of redemption that God had for all of Creation. Jesus knew how this parade would end. He knew the same people who were shouting praises to God would, five days later be screaming “Crucify Him!”. He knew that Jerusalem was where his most antagonistic enemies had the most power. He knew they wanted to kill Him. He knew this was God’s plan to fulfill the promise of God to Adam and Eve. His death would procure the forgiveness of sins. The fear of human death will be destroyed when Jesus rises from death and the grave, as told in Hebrews 2:14

To the Romans, He didn’t look much like a king that day riding on a donkey, “nothing to worry about.” This parade, on the cobble stone payment of Jerusalem, did not impress Romans. At all.

Most of us know the general outline of today’s story. But there may be some have never considered the story in any detail. Why did Jesus send two of his disciples into the village to procure a donkey? He had walked into Jerusalem hundreds of times before. He had healed people in Jerusalem before. So, why ride into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey? Why did the people wave palm branches, this time? Why did they cry out “Hosanna!” as he passed by? What does it all mean?

The Bible tells us why Jesus rode a donkey; for he was fulfilling an ancient prophecy from Zechariah 9:9. Words, written 575 years earlier, predicted that when the Messiah came to Israel, he would come riding on a donkey.

Jesus is a king, but he is not like any earthly king. The Palm Sunday Parade was an “acted out parable,” in which Jesus was sending a clear message to the nation. “This is who I am! I am your King, but I am not the King you were expecting!” I am not a king who will throw out the Romans. I am the King who will defeat Satan. My cross and empty tomb will strip Satan of His false power.

When the people saw him riding into Jerusalem that day, they knew that something exciting was happening. They knew that Jesus was riding as the Messiah would, and they thought they knew what that meant. They thought it meant they would be free from the Romans, they thought it meant that Jesus was going to be their King. So they got caught up in the excitement of the moment and celebrated, rejoiced at the picture which was forming in their mind’s eye. A picture of a king who would save them. A picture of a nation reborn. A picture of a people who would be free to be a mighty nation again. This was the reason that the people ran in front of the donkey, throwing down palm branches and clothes in its path. The reason they celebrated, they danced down the street, they shouted “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

The dreams of that Palm Sunday were soon turned into the true realities of the betrayal, the trial and the crucifixion. For the reality of the situation was Jesus was not the kind of hero they hoped he would be. Jesus was not the kind of king to lead an earthly army. Jesus would not deliver the Jews from the Romans. Their dreams of who Jesus was turned into the reality of Jesus as a heavenly Messiah which they could not understand. Even Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem wept for his beloved city, as it says in Luke's gospel, for he knew the dreams of this day would turn into the reality of pain, death, and suffering.

It was Passover week. The city was packed with Jews from all over the world who had come to remember God's action in their history. The inns were full. They were sacrificing lambs, so they would remember the blood on the door posts in their Egyptian hovels that saved lives when the angel of death passed over. Soon, very soon, the blood of the Lamb of God staining a wooden cross beam, would save people from their broken commandments.

God's holy and righteous character demands punishment for the sinner. We know it. We feel it in our soul. Human beings are seeking peace with their Creator. In the past God had always accepted the offering of a lamb, a bull, or a goat. For the blood made atonement for sins. But now He has arrived in Jerusalem in the midst of his people, in the person of His son, Jesus. Remember that Hebrews 1:1 states: "For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through His sacrificial death." Jesus was the substitute, the perfect Lamb of God whose final steps to the cross would free us from slavery to sin and the fear of eternal death. When I began this message is said: "The arrival of Jesus on Palm Sunday would change the normal understanding of life and death."

So are we also like the crowd present at the first Palm Sunday, still wanting Jesus to be a conquering warrior? Or do we get it. Do we understand. Do we understand that instead we get a messiah who gives us power all right, but it's a whole new kind of power, it's the power of suffering love!

It's a power that looks us in the eye, forgives our sins, our fears, our anger, our resentments, our prejudices!

It's a power that didn't assert itself over and against us, but died for us!

It's a power that sets us free from all of that which is within us that dehumanizes us and others!

It's a power that loosens our grip on all of our expectations and even allows us to see Christ's face in the least and most lowly on this planet!

It's a power that relates in grace, and invites us to join with him in being one of his special grace givers.

It's a power that assures us that we don't need to be afraid of suffering, self-giving love, because it's the only way we will ever fulfill my humanity, and find my purpose, and experience true joy and peace."1

The crowds on that first Palm Sunday wanted a Warrior King, but Jesus came as a suffering Messiah. Jesus came as one who would die on a cross for the sake of human kind. But the crowd totally missed the point. The crowd thought they knew but they did not.

What about us? Do we get it? Is Jesus the suffering Messiah for us? Or are we still looking for a Warrior King who will turn the world upside down?

Do we see Jesus as the suffering Messiah who did turn the world upside down for our sake and continues to shape the world with his love and grace? So a parade gathers, we see Jesus coming, but what do each of us see? Amen.

Benediction:

The road has been long. You have seen much on this journey, but it is not time to quit. There is much to be done. Go in peace, dear people of God. Go ready to proclaim with your lives that Jesus is Lord and Savior. Go to offer God's love and peace to all. AMEN.