



Saint John United Methodist Church
12700 W. Hwy. 42, Prospect, KY 40059
stjohnky.com

Message for April 10, 2022
"Lay Down Your Branches"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

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, 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. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.

Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

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.

A Refrain of Honor

It wasn't all that long ago that we were singing Christmas Carols. One, in particular, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* gave us the opportunity to sing "*glory to the newborn King.*" The melody of the angels upon the birth of Christ was "*glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those he favors.*" Theirs was a refrain of hope that honored the long-awaited King who had finally come.

Fast forward some 33 years after the birth of Jesus and the same sort of refrain was repeated, this time by a group of faithful followers who witnessed Jesus making his way into Jerusalem near the beginning of Passover week. Theirs was the refrain of those honoring a coming king. Instead of a newborn King, the life of this King would soon be drawing to a close. "*Hosanna!*" they shouted. "*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!*"

Hosanna

The word, “*hosanna*” was the perfect word for Christ’s Triumphant Entry. “*Hosanna*” is a Hebrew word that mixes exuberant praise with the hope that God will bring salvation. The persons who gathered there along that street as Jesus entered Jerusalem were asking for the very thing they needed, and the very thing Jesus was able to deliver. It is the very thing we need as well.

“Save us now, Lord, save us now.”

All about the Kingdom of God

From beginning to end, Jesus was all about the Kingdom of God. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus stated things quite clearly, “*The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.*” (Mark 1:15)

Near the end of his life, Jesus was still all about the Kingdom. He went to great lengths to make sure there was no confusion about what he was sent to do. Jesus was well-aware that there were many who had thoughts quite different from his when it came to the coming Kingdom. Some of those people may have very well included a few of his disciples.

Interestingly, the persons who thought such things came by their thoughts quite honestly. A couple of hundred years before Christ walked the face of the earth, a fellow by the name of Judas Maccabaeus held off Antiochus Epiphanes whose desire was to wipe out Jewish culture and religion and replace it with all things Greek. Antiochus Epiphanes was the one who desecrated the temple by sacrificing pigs on the altar of God. Upon defeating Antiochus, Judas Maccabaeus was welcomed into Jerusalem as a conquering hero.

I Maccabees 13:51 records that as Judas Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem the people received him “*with thanksgiving and branches of palm trees, with harps and cymbals, with hymns and songs, because there was destroyed a great enemy out of Israel.*”

Judas Maccabaeus was a conquering hero, and the people of Christ’s day were looking for someone just like him to do to the Romans what he did to the Greeks. A lot of people thought Jesus was that guy. For those of that mindset, there was no better time to make that known than during Passover, the very festival that commemorated God setting his people free from their bondage in Egypt.

Jesus had other intentions. He would enter Jerusalem that Passover not as a conquering hero, but as One who came in peace, ushering in a Kingdom of a different sort.

Willing to Obey

Jesus had things well-planned out. He calculated his every move. He didn’t want there to be any mistaking who he was and the sort of Kingdom he was trying to establish.

Jesus sent two of his disciples to a village near Bethany where he was staying to retrieve a colt that had yet been ridden. Those two disciples must have thought that what Jesus asked them to do was a bit unusual. Even so, they were willing to oblige.

There’s a question there for you to consider, “*Are you willing to obey even when you don’t fully understand what Jesus might be asking you to do?*”

If you are anything like me, you would like to know what you are getting into, why you are doing it, and what the eventual outcome might be. When it comes to obedience, everything doesn't have to add up. The life of faith calls us more times than not to "*see in a mirror dimly*."

As Paul writes in I Corinthians 13:12, "*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*" (I Corinthians 13:12)

The Lord Has Need of It

The scripture records that as the two disciples are about to retrieve the colt, there were understandably those who asked what they were doing. They probably thought the disciples were stealing it. It would have been analogous to grand theft auto back in the day.

The disciples responded as Jesus instructed them, "*The Lord needs it.*" That seemed to satisfy those who were questioning them. Again, you get the sense that Jesus had already worked things out in advance, as if the phrase "*the Lord needs it*" was code for releasing the colt into the right hands.

How do you respond when the request, "*the Lord has need of it*" comes your way? Whether it involves something you have, some amount of money, some investment of time, some offer of a certain talent, **or**, even more importantly, your life, are you ready to respond?

A Kingdom of Peace

Back in those days, a colt that had not been ridden was often set aside for some sacred purpose, and as we have come to know there was nothing more sacred than what Christ was about to do. The fact that the colt was more than likely a young donkey brought to mind for those who gathered along the road upon Christ's Triumphant Entry the great passage from Zechariah 9:9.

We studied that passage a couple of summers ago during our study of the Minor Prophets. "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, and riding on the back of a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey.*" (Zechariah 9:9)

When a king went to war, he rode on a horse. When he came in peace he rode on a donkey. The Kingdom Jesus sought to establish was a Kingdom of peace and he wanted to get that across.

I have to tell you I have been praying for peace. I was praying for peace before the first shot was fired into the Ukraine. I have fervently asked God to intervene and trust that he will. Selfishness, self-interest, and pride has gotten in the way of that. This is such a needless, pointless war. I trust that we consistently and courageously stand on the side of right on this one.

Let's pray for peace and work for it each and every day, whether it involves the Ukraine or in some other circumstance where there is discord and strife. Those sorts of things are both near and far.

"*Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me*" rings true and is a challenge for every one of us.

In Praise of Christ the King

Cloaks were laid down before as Christ entered Jerusalem. Palm branches were waved in honor of the One who was coming in the name of the Lord.

- What are you “*laying down*” to honor Christ?
- How are you bringing him glory?

The answer to these questions has everything to do with how you live your life. Honoring Christ and bringing him glory has everything to do with the things we say and the things we do. It strikes to the heart of what it means to worship our Lord.

Words ring hollow if they are not followed up with right actions, and right actions fall flat if not defined by the things we say. Let us then honor and praise our Lord both by what we say and do. It’s easy to do that on Sunday. It’s another thing entirely to do that the other days of the week.

The Rhythm of Holy Week

That sort of thing plays out the last week of Christ’s life, and I contend does all the time in our lives. We can grow a bit fickle during the week. We certainly can waver.

During the Easter Cantata a couple of weeks ago, musical presentation, the narration spoke very clearly to the fact that many of those offering their “*Hosannas*” on Sunday were some of the same people who yelled, “*Crucify him, crucify him*” on Friday.

I have often thought about the mindset of those who lined the street the day of Christ’s Triumphant Entry as they laid down their cloaks, waved their branches, and shouted their Hosannas. I have often thought why there was so many at the beginning of the week and so few at the end.

Everybody likes a good parade, not so, a crucifixion, particularly the crucifixion of one so good and so loving. Clearly those who lined the street upon Christ’s Triumphant Entry hadn’t fully grasped what was to come, even though Christ had been clear about that throughout his ministry. Those who persevered though through the entirety of Christ’s last week would come to understand.

Therein lies both the challenge and opportunity of this week for every one of us.

- Today, we celebrate the Triumphant Entry.
- On Thursday, we will observe what took place in the Upper Room.
- On Friday what happened on the cross.
- Our journey won’t end there though. We look forward to Easter and the grand celebration of Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

In walking that journey we too will begin to understand, and our lives will be turned, just as those who experienced the whole of Christ’s last week.

So then, let’s us then lift our voices just like those of old, “*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!*”