**Palm Sunday**

**Sunday April 10, 2022**

**“The Triumphal Entry” (Luke 19:28-40)**

The account of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem is preached each year on Palm Sunday. All four Gospels tell this story, although, each one highlights certain aspects of the event. This morning we’ll discover Luke’s particular take on this important episode in the life of Jesus. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, inviting each one of us to continue our journey toward the Cross. This passage has a deep significance for Christians as they reflect on their Lord’s journey towards Good Friday. The image of Jesus, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey amidst the joyful crowd of pilgrims evokes different thoughts and emotions within us. We see Jesus, our friend and Savior, resolute in his path to the Cross, bravely facing the painful days ahead. By his actions, he signals to the crowd and to us, that he is a person of peace who does not use force or intimidation to bring about his kingdom. He comes to his people, “*lowly and riding on a donkey”* (Zechariah 9:9). This is our God, *the Servant King*.

Jesus’ actions on that day sparked different reactions among those in the crowd. His followers immediately recognized the importance of this moment and loudly proclaimed his unique identity. They sang praises to God for the wonderful miracles that he had performed (19:37) and boldly announced that Jesus was the Messiah, singing, “*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord*” (19:38). The Pharisees, however, were not very amused by the disciples’ songs and celebration, so they urged Jesus to constrain his followers and get the situation under control. But they didn’t realize that even if Jesus’ followers were muzzled, all creation would continue to give praise to God. As we contemplate this story of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, let’s carefully consider each character in the story, for each one issues a challenge to us, each one is teaching us a valuable lesson.

*What do the actions of Jesus teach us?* To begin with, one little phrase jumps out at me. We read in verse 28, “After telling this story, Jesus went on toward Jerusalem, *walking ahead of his disciples.*” While this verse marks a geographical transition from Jericho to Jerusalem (18:35; 19:1), I find the little phrase, “*walking ahead of his disciples,”* to be very interesting. In my mind’s eye, I can see Jesus, walking down the road with his disciples following behind. This image gives us wonderful, vivid pictures of *discipleship* and *leadership*. First, it reveals Jesus’ commitment to walk the path that God had planned for him. He was aware of the difficulties that were in store for him in Jerusalem, yet he did not hesitate to continue down the road that would end with his death. *Discipleship is following Jesus down the road, learning from him, and becoming more like him*. Jesus said, “*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”* (Mark 8:34). It is a pathway of self-denial, sacrifice, spiritual growth, and service. Are you prepared to follow Jesus down the rugged road of being his disciple? Are we encouraging each other to grow deeper in Christ? Are we ready, as a congregation, to follow Jesus’ lead?

Jesus walking down the road ahead of his disciples is the way a shepherd leads his sheep. The Great Shepherd does not walk behind us, striking us with his shepherd’s crook to get us moving faster. Jesus does not force us to do his will through intimidation or coercion. No, our Gentle Shepherd calls us, his sheep, by name and invites us to follow him to green pastures and still waters. As the flock under the care of the Good Shepherd, we need to be attentive to his voice and be willing to follow where he leads. At the same time, leaders in the church need to imitate Jesus’ way of leadership. Pastors and church leaders should never use their power to dominate others. Jesus said to his disciples, “*You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them.**But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave”* (Matthew 20:25-27). Christian leaders must lead like Jesus, the *Servant King.*

A careful look at this passage reveals that it is all about the issue of *power* and *leadership*. Jesus was very intentional in the manner that he entered the city that day. By his actions, he exemplified what it means to be a leader within the Kingdom of God. Jesus, the King of Kings had arrived in Jerusalem, yet his kingdom was clearly not of this world. Instead of wielding worldly power, Jesus’ kingship was characterized by humility, service, and suffering. To communicate this idea, Jesus, like the prophets of the Old Testament, performed a highly symbolic act that presented an object lesson to the people. His actions alluded to a passage from the prophet Zechariah:

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!  
    Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!  
*See, your king comes to you,  
    righteous and victorious*,  
*lowly and riding on a donkey,  
    on a colt, the foal of a donkey*” (Zech. 9:9).

By riding on a donkey, he was clearly pointing to this passage from Zechariah and its declaration that Israel’s king would arrive in a humble manner, riding on a donkey. Not only was Jesus making an unmistakable claim to be king, but he was also emphasizing the peaceful nature of his kingdom. He didn’t ride into Jerusalem on a warhorse, sword in hand, flexing his muscles, and ready to conquer by force. No, the Prince of Peace was riding on a donkey, coming to his people in a spirit of peace and love. Jesus challenged the popular messianic expectations of his day, and his example continues to challenge modern notions of power and leadership. He did not act like the conquering warrior that everyone expected. By the end of the week, he would be victorious, but not in the way that people expected - not with a sword, but on a cross. Let us strive to live by the example of Jesus, *the Servant King.*

*What do the actions of crowd and the disciples teach us?* It was the beginning of the Passover, and the road was filled with pilgrims who were making their way toward Jerusalem for this important holiday. As Jesus “*rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him*” (19:36). This was an act of respect for Jesus, and it showed that the crowd had some insight into his identity and the significance of his actions because placing one’s cloak on the road in front of a person was an honour given to *a* *king* (2 Kings 9:12-13). While one may question the type of king the crowd was expecting, they had enough understanding to see Jesus as their king.

As Jesus began his descent down the Mount of Olives, into the Kidron Valley and up toward the city gates, “*all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen*” (19:37). Their praise songs echoed the Hebrew Scriptures:

*“Blessed is the king  
    who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven,  
    and glory in the highest heaven”* (Luke 19:38).

Jesus’ disciples had seen so much in the three years that they had been with him and now they were praising God “*for all the wonderful miracles they had seen*.” Their exuberant praise is an example to all of us of the importance of worship in the Christian life. Richard Foster writes: “*We worship the Lord not only because of who He is but also because of what He has done. Above all, the God of the Bible is the God who acts. His goodness, faithfulness, justice, mercy all can be seen in his dealings with His people. His gracious actions are not only etched into ancient history, but are engraved into our personal histories. We praise God for who He is, and thank Him for what He has done*” (*Celebration of Discipline,* p. 140).

The disciples’ praise song celebrated God’s gracious activity in Jesus. Their joyful shouts echoed the words of Psalm 118. They sang out, “*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven”* (19:38). They were praising Jesus, their King and God’s envoy on earth, the One who comes in the name of the Lord. They were giving thanks for God’s reconciliation in Jesus, who made *peace* between God and people through the cross. Foster writes, “*Worship is our responding to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father”* (*Celebration of Discipline,* p. 138). Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all. Let us worship and bend the knee before Jesus, the *Servant King.*

*What do the actions of the Pharisees teach us?* Amidst this wonderful moment of praise and worship, there was great opposition. We read in verse 39, “*But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!”* Eugene Peterson’s translation of this verse gets to the heart of what’s happening here, “*Some Pharisees from the crowd told him, “Teacher, get your disciples under control!*”

The Pharisees wanted to silence the praises of the disciples, so they tried to draw Jesus into the situation and compel him to act. But Jesus would have nothing to do with their futile attempts to stifle the praises of the people. Jesus replied, “*If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers”* (19:40). In that moment when the King of Kings entered Jerusalem, all creation had joined in the praise party, and nothing could have stopped that! Even if people are silenced, the stones would cry out in praise.

Once again, the issue of power comes to the fore in this passage. Too often we try to control the narrative and silence the voices of difference and nonconformity. Some might even say, “*Get those people under control.”* But the Christian way is not one of control and manipulation.But we are the Body of Christ and all of us are members of that wonderfully diverse Body. All of you have a God-given value. All of you have a God-given role to play in this Body. All of you have gifts to share. All of you have a voice to express your thoughts. No one should have the power to silence others.

“So let us learn how to serve  
And in our lives enthrone Him  
Each other's needs to prefer  
For it is Christ we're serving

This is our God, The Servant King  
He calls us now to follow Him  
To bring our lives as a daily offering  
Of worship to The Servant King”

(Graham Kendrick, *The Servant King)*