

## **Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem**

<sup>1</sup>When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" <sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

<sup>10</sup>Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

<sup>11</sup>Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

**Our Part in the Parade**  
**Oak Grove Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher**  
**March 28, 2021**  
**Mark 11:1–11**

If God had asked my opinion, if I had had a say in the big picture of Christ's final week, I would have done things a bit differently. For starters, we would have ended the week today, Palm Sunday. Who doesn't love a good Parade? The excitement of what is coming next the pageantry the energy. This is it. The big finale. As I see it, Jesus has achieved his success as Messiah with this day. He enters the sacred city of Jerusalem riding into the economic hub with a crowd surrounding him. What more can he ask for? This is the point where the credits start scrolling down, because we all like a happy ending. We like to end on top. Country boy makes good. Jesus finally gets credit for all he has done. So, let's just end it here.

Fortunately, God did not ask me to be part of the planning team. God's wisdom is greater than my simplistic need for a feel-good story. Fortunately, God had something much more profound than an everyday hero rising out of nowhere. We all know that there is much more to the story.

But on that day, the people did not have the foresight of what was ahead. So what was on their minds when Jesus rides into Jerusalem with shouts of hosanna surrounding him? What part did the people have to play in this great parade?

That day in Jerusalem there were many people who saw what was happening. Each one had their own perspective. And how would they see this day?

There were the Pharisees and the temple priests. Passover was their busy time. And it was a highly anxious time, where were they in relation to the parade? We know about the priests and pharisees, they were collaborators with the Roman occupiers. They worked with the Romans to protect themselves but they also worked with them to protect the people. To keep their tenuous autonomy in Jerusalem and in the Temple, they had to make sure the Romans saw no threat of revolt. They had to get along with the Roman government. That meant keeping the peace no matter what; no demonstrations and no disruptions. They must have felt justified, but that it was their duty to preserve their religious freedom from Rome and their very existence and the existence of all the Jews.

The Roman soldiers intentionally built up a presence during the Passover season. After all Passover was a celebration of liberation from the rule of Egypt by God's hand. It does not take many dots to connect Passover as an opportunity to protest the Roman rule. Although we view the religious leaders as the villains, they were also out to protect the status quo because they feared what might happen if they did not. Anything could happen.

Not all the Pharisees were of one mind about Jesus. Nicodemus, came to Jesus at night to ask what he must do to enter eternal life. And Joseph of Arimathea donated the tomb where Jesus' body would be laid at the end of this week. These two were Pharisees but were not involved in trying to do away with Jesus. Others saw Jesus as a threat to them and to the people. He was not one of them. He was causing a disruption and he needed to be silenced.

Do we find ourselves at times in the Pharisee place? Let's not rock the boat. Let's keep the peace at all costs even when we have to be silent rather than take a stand to what is right. Let's appease the

authorities. How often do we trade an illusion of peace and not speak up for injustice in our own lives?

Also, there that day, were the disciples. These are the ones who knew Jesus' best. How did they interpret this event? Sometimes in familiarity, we lose perspective. Were they excited that Jesus was finally coming into his own, or were they a bit concerned that he might be getting carried away and doing too much? Each of the disciples would make sense of this scene in their own way. We see this with the four gospel writers, but we also know that at the moment they did not fully understand what was happening. In the Gospel of Mark, the times Jesus predicts his death the disciples either rebuke him (in the case of Peter), or do not understand him or try to change the subject. The last we see of the disciples is at Jesus' arrest. They do not appear again until after the resurrection. The disciples are filled with best intentions, but are rather weak in follow through. As a whole, they fail Jesus, when Jesus needs them most.

Maybe the disciples are secretly wishing that Jesus would just blend in and not draw such attention to them. After all they are mere country folks coming into the big city for Passover. They must have felt like self-conscious outsiders.

It is tempting as disciples today to try to blend in and not make a scene. We leave prejudiced comments unchallenged or overlook an injustice because we don't want to offend others. We don't want to draw attention to ourselves and we certainly do not want a confrontation. And so, sometimes we stay at the edges of the parade not sharing our love for God or for our neighbor and let comments pass that hurt others. There are times when we do need to boldly claim our mandate to love one another even when no

matter the opposition. There are times when we don't just go with the flow but take a stand because it is the right thing to do.

At that palm parade are the people who happen to be there that day. These are people who don't have the time or the luxury to ponder over the prophecies of God. They have not been with Jesus in his inner circle. They are caught up in the moment and excitement and they shout loud their hosannas and wave their branches. What happens to them when evening falls? I wonder, do they look back on this day as a significant one in their lives or is it a passing enthusiasm and then their attention is drawn elsewhere?

We do not know. Maybe with the passage of time do they realize what a holy moment this is.

Are we any different? Many times, we experience the holy as we look back in our lives. Many times, we do not fully appreciate the moment until it is past. And many times, we move on leaving that moment behind.

We have had a year that has been like no other. A year ago, we were filled with great uncertainty not knowing how long this siege with a virus would continue. And then, on our own doorstep, we have blatant violence toward another. We see it graphically on our screens. How will we look back on all that has happened in this past year? Are we changed by it? Have there been holy moments? Have we grown and become more aware of the plight of our neighbor?

Palm Sunday is a life-changing event. It is the public acknowledgment of the Messiah. It is a parade in which the Pharisees fail to see because their fear of the Romans and protection of the status quo; the disciples fail to understand

because of their own personal lives; the crowd fails to recognize in its passing. We know that the rest of the week is coming. We know what happens to Jesus and how the world is changed with the events to come. Are our lives changed because of man rides into the great city on a donkey? No, not by this lone event, however our lives are changed irrevocably because God chooses to love us so much that his only son comes to Jerusalem and stands up to the way things are. We are changed for good because death is defeated once and for all.

Can we comprehend such an event for us? Maybe we can but only in part. And so, we gather and we pray and we sing. We gather knowing that God with us.

The high note of Palm Sunday is not the last note because there is more to come. We move through the week of betrayal, denial, death and loss to reach the greatest victory of all. What part you are in this parade into Jerusalem up to you. As Palm Sunday fits in with the rest of the story, know that something big happened here. So big that after the crowd goes back home and resumes their lives; after the great Roman Empire falls into distant memory in the history books; this parade of the Galilean into Jerusalem is still being told. We continue to proclaim yes, the Messiah, the promised one is here. This parade continues on not because of that day but what happens on Golgotha in the tomb and in the victory over death itself. The greatest victory of all. Thanks be to God. Amen.