

They Shouted, "Hosanna in the Highest!"

Mark 11:1-11

March 24, 2024

A little boy was sick on Palm Sunday and stayed home from church with his mother. His father returned from church holding a palm branch. The little boy was curious and asked, "Why do you have the palm branch, dad?" His dad said, "You see, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved palm branches to honor him, so we got palm branches today." The little boy replied, "Aw shucks! The one Sunday that I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!" (1)

Jesus began the last week of his life with his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. What lay ahead for him was the cleansing of the temple, a day of ministry, a day of rest, his last meal with his disciples, the cross, the tomb, and his resurrection. It was an amazing week.

That Sunday Jesus showed up as he rode into Jerusalem. It was the culmination of several weeks of travel as he and his disciples had worked their way back to the city. In no hurry they had ministered to many along the way. For his followers it looked as if things were going to work out. The crowds were responding to Jesus and celebrating his coming as their king. It was the first day of Passover and the streets were packed with thousands of people. This was a time of preparation for the celebration of the Passover which was to be on Friday that year. For the Jews, Passover was their largest and most important annual celebration as they remembered the freedom and salvation that God had provided for them when they began their Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. Although it had been nearly fifteen hundred years since the Passover event, the Jews faithfully celebrated it by offering the blood of the Passover lamb, sharing in a meal, and telling their story.

Jesus and his disciples had stayed for two days at the home of his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany which was about two miles southeast of Jerusalem. Now it is the first day of the week and time to get the ball rolling toward Easter morning. As Jesus and his disciples were walking near Bethphage at the halfway point on their walk to Jerusalem, he sent two of his disciples into the village to get a donkey colt which had never been ridden so that he could ride it into Jerusalem. Strange! He walks everywhere he goes and now he needs a colt of a donkey to ride the last mile?! Jesus sent his disciples on this mission but did not tell them to ask permission before taking the animal. Instead, he instructs them that if anyone asks them why they are taking the colt that they are to say: "The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly." (Mark 11:3) This mission seems to be a little on the risky side. Taking someone's donkey colt without asking permission is akin to stealing. It would be like a couple of buddies going down to the local Ford dealer and picking out a new F-150 for a trial run with the sticker in the window, the keys in the ignition and telling the dealer that the Lord needs it, and he will see to it that is returned in a little while. That probably wouldn't fly. (2) The disciples found the colt tied at a doorway,

and as they untied it, those standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying the colt.” They told them what Jesus had instructed them to say and the people agreed that they could take the colt. Jesus had told them the right thing.

It is not very often we read in the scriptures that the Lord says that he needs anything. The truth here is that he did not need it for himself but in order that he might fulfill the prophecy written by the prophet Zechariah five-hundred and fifty years earlier about the coming Messiah: “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout Daughters 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 9:9)

Jesus sent his disciples so that they could secure the colt and fulfill God’s plan for their lives at that time and place and that they also might play a part in the bigger picture of his eternal plan for humanity. Jesus asks us as Christians to participate in his plan for our lives. He shows the way, provides whatever is needed to carry out his mission, but the decision is always ours as to if we will carry it out. Jesus uses you and me to carry out God’s good purposes.

Methodist minister Reverend Kenneth Sauer tells of a Tuesday evening that he and his daughter Mary Ellen spent together at the movie theater several years ago. She was a preschooler and he was trying to find something age-appropriate for her to watch with her dad. There were two choices: one was an animated 3-D movie that seemed too violent for a 3-year-old. The other showed a poster of a man smiling a mile wide and carrying his cross. It was simply titled: “The Cross.” Reverend Sauer thought it might be one of those not too well produced movies marketed for Christians, but he wasn’t sure. It turned out to be a documentary of a young man, clean cut---fresh out of school who wanted to be an evangelist. It starts out in 1968 at the height of the hippie movement and God is calling him to Los Angeles. He longs to bring the good news of Jesus to a lost generation of youth. He preached to hippies on the streets. He “rented a little hole-in-the wall storefront and called it simply—His Place. His name was Arthur Blessitt. He made up little red stickers with the words “Jesus Loves You” and walked around the streets and hippie communes passing them out. His little residence became a hang out and he thought it needed a large wooden cross to hang on the wall. He had been ministering to the Hell’s Angels. He found that he did not have a wrench to fasten the beams together. Just then a Hell’s Angel guy pulled up on his motor cycle and Arthur asked him if he had a wrench and he did. They fastened the beams together. Two days later the man was at His Place staring at the cross. He said that he had never noticed before but that there were crosses all over the place and said to Arthur: “Tell me about this cross.” Soon Arthur felt called to carry the cross with him wherever he was and tell everyone he met with the simple message: “Jesus Loves You.” Soon God called him to carry his cross across America, but two weeks before he was to start found out he had a brain aneurism. He fully expected to die but decided to go on the intended date—deciding “that he would rather

live within the will of God than live outside the will of God.” He started out on Christmas morning 1969 and on June 7, 2008 he completed walking with his cross in every nation in the world. He has walked on all seven continents. He has walked over 42,000 miles and nearly 85 million steps with his cross. He has been arrested 24 times. He is 77 and still carrying his cross today on this his 50th anniversary year. Reverend Sauer was blessed that night to choose “The Cross” and probably little Mary Ellen got something out of the movie although her dad did not mention it. (3)

That day in Bethphage the disciples did as the Lord asked. “They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their coats over it, he sat on it.” (Mark 11:7) Jesus was a tall person about six inches taller than the average man, if you believe the evidence left behind by the shroud of Turin. At nearly six feet it is easy to see that Jesus was dragging or was nearly dragging his feet as the colt walked. He was not carrying a sword and did not have one on his saddle—he did not have a saddle. No saddle, just old overcoats to sit on. What did Zechariah write? “Your king comes to you...gentle and riding... on a colt.” (Zechariah 9:9) Jesus fit the bill to a T. Although those in the crowd were not biblical scholars, they knew a Messianic appearance when they saw one. There was an aura of excitement in the air; after all, their nation had waited over five-hundred years for that day!

God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things for him and his kingdom. The disciples went and got the colt as a part of God’s extraordinary plan for their lives. The donkey colt on Palm Sunday was just an ordinary colt, but God had an extraordinary mission for him. He carried the King of the Universe on his back heading to THE CROSS. This is while the crowds shouted: “Hosanna!” “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest.” (Mark 11:9-10) And... “many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread branches they had cut in the fields.” (Mark 11:8) Extraordinary acts of praise by ordinary people who were preparing the way for the Messiah. Doing even little things for Jesus are extraordinary acts done by ordinary people. They are the building blocks for living the most extraordinary kind of life—a Christian life. Living for Jesus makes life amazing.

The crowds shouted, and many people, but certainly not all, missed the real meaning of Jesus’ humble coming. They were looking for freedom from Roman oppression, but Jesus offered them salvation—freedom from themselves—the worst part of themselves; selfishness, guilt, shame, sin, fear, and brokenness with God! Jesus offered them life, abundant, full, and eternal. That is what he offers to anyone who will believe in him. He is the gift of true joy, peace, and life.

There is a story from the days of the Civil War about a woman who sat crying on a park bench outside the White House. Her husband had died, and when her son heard about this, he left his post on the battlefield to comfort and support his mom. But when he got home, he was arrested and now was going to be shot by a firing squad. The woman had come to the White House to see President Lincoln in hopes that he might intervene. But to

her dismay, she had been turned away at the gate. “The President was too busy to see her,” she had been told. So, she sat at the park bench off to the side, crying. After a while, a little boy walked up to her and asked her why she was crying. She told the boy her story and ended by saying that all she wanted to do was to see the President, because she knew that he was a fair man and her son would be pardoned. To her great surprise, the little boy asked her to follow him. As they approached the front gate, the little boy said to the soldier that it was alright for them to enter. “She’s with me,” he said. To her amazement, they stepped aside and together they made their way into the White House past generals and cabinet officers. Finally, the little boy pushed into the room, and running, he jumped on the President’s lap. “Daddy,” he said. “Here’s a lady who needs to see you. She needs your help.”

The little boy who stopped to talk to the woman was Todd Lincoln and upon hearing the woman’s story, President Lincoln issued a Presidential pardon and the woman’s son was spared.

Like that story from the Civil War, God’s son has come to speak to us. He has offered to lead us into the Father’s presence. Palm Sunday is a great time to become a follower of Jesus Christ. (4)

Being a spectator and cheering on the sidelines as Jesus passed by was not enough. Some of them fell in behind Jesus and followed and lived an extraordinary life for him. He offers us the same opportunity! Alleluia! Amen.

- (1) Sermoncentral “Palm Sunday” Thomas Bowen April 27, 2008 p. 1
- (2) Ibid. p. 2
- (3) Sermoncentral “God Uses the Ordinary” Kenneth Sauer April 3, 2009 p. 2-5
- (4) Sermoncentral “A Mismatch Between Our Expectation and God’s Answer” Kenneth Sauer April 13, 2011 p. 5-6