

Palm Sunday

Welcome to the worship of Valley Forge United Methodist Church. I am Rev. Michael Johnson, the pastor and will be lead us this morning. I hope that you are all doing well and are remembering to send in your tithes and offerings to the church office to help our church continue meeting its obligations. Don't worry about giving what you don't have, but share some of what you do, as part of your worship.

At the end of our service we will be sharing in a love feast.
So I hope you have prepared some sweet bread and something to drink to share with your family and as our family.

Let us pray: Bind us together Lord, with bonds that cannot be broken, bind us together in love as we worship together today. Amen

Matthew 21:1-11

When *Jesus and his disciples* had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately. This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet saying,

"Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"

The crowds were saying,

"This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Let us pray: On this day of palms, we ask "Who is this?" We know what others have told us, but who is this to us, personally? Reveal yourself to us who come before you this

day. Reveal yourself is the core of our being, in the holy of holies of our own souls. Speak to our hearts for we are listening, to your sweet, sweet spirit. Amen.

Message:

“Who Is This?”

When I was a child, Jesus was to me, just another Bible character. His story was one of the very first I heard as a child. I knew about his birth in Bethlehem with the cute animals. I knew that Jesus had healing powers and fed lots of people with a little kids lunch. I knew he rode a donkey and died on the cross for my sins.

As I have matured I have continued to ask who is this? Jesus can ask for whatever he needs, and just say, I need it and expect it to be given. Who is this who has the power to heal any illness, even death, at least for some, but not for everyone and surely not on our schedule.

Lazarus one of his friends, someone he loved. Mary and Martha asked him, why? Why did you let our brother just die? We thought we were friends? Jesus wept and then called him back to life out of the tomb. Who is this?

For Jesus it was not about having the power to do anything. He used his relationship with God to help lots of people, but miracle worker was not really who Jesus was. Exorcist was not really who Jesus was either, even though he would cast out demons from time to time. It did not define his life. Jesus healed like nobody else, the blind, the lame, the deaf, even people with contagious incurable diseases that everyone feared. But Jesus took no credit, brushed off acclaim. Who is this?

Jesus in the eyes of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the doctors of the law and the religious leaders of the people, saw Jesus as only trouble. They were frustrated by his apparent lack of appreciation for the law, especially the keeping of the Sabbath. Jesus would heal on the Sabbath right in front of them, as if he was daring them to do something about it. They believed that he was in league with the powers of evil, casting out demons by the prince of demons. They would look at the company that Jesus kept and they would just shake their heads in disbelief. How could he claim to be a person of holiness and associate with well known sinful men and women? If you associate with low life, then you must also stoop as low as they do. They also were amazed that Jesus was so willing to become unclean. With his own hands he touched those who had been cursed by God by disease. He willingly was in contact with Samaritans and even Gentiles. And he had the audacity to claim a relationship with the God of heaven. Who is this?

To the leaders of the people of Israel Jesus was a political danger. He drew large crowds that made their Roman overseers nervous. They believed that his life was expendable for the sake of the whole nation. The lives of the many were more important than the life of this one man.

Martha of Bethany knew who Jesus was. She had testified saying, “Yes, Lord, I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” God had revealed this truth to her just as the Spirit had done for Peter who testified, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus said he was blessed because flesh and blood had not revealed this truth of Christ’s identity but only the Father in heaven. Who is this? God is the only one who truly knows, and is the source of this important revelation.

We do not know who Jesus is by what he does, because Jesus told us clearly, that he has done nothing, but God has done everything. Jesus also says that we the followers of Christ will

do even greater works than what he ever did, when the same Holy Spirit comes upon us. So if it is not by the great works that he has done, how do we know who Jesus really is? Only by what God's Spirit is telling your spirit as a child of God.

On Palm Sunday the crowd started gathering momentum. And the excitement grew and grew. Who was this person entering into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives? The crowd was a buzz. This was Jesus, the son of King David. This was Jesus the prophet of God from Nazareth of Galilee. Everyone was caught up in the excitement. They were ready for deliverance from their enemies. They were ready for God to reestablish the Nation of Israel as a free and independent country. God was going to do something, they just knew it. If they could not get excited about something like this, they had to have rocks in their heads. Even the rocks would sing his praises.

There was so much positive energy. Who was this?

Public acclaim means little. It comes and goes. What is important is what happens when things cool down and you have time to think. Now who is this Jesus?

In your deepest heart of hearts, what has God revealed to you about who he is for you? Is Jesus a teacher whose ideas have changed the way you look at the world and your place in it? Is Jesus a great Prophet who has revealed to you the vision of God for your life? Is Jesus a lover whose grace has accepted you as you are and encourages you to become so much more? Is Jesus the great Physician who has brought healing to your body, mind, or soul, so that you are forever grateful? Is Jesus the example of the way you want to live, a truth that has become your guiding principle, the one who brings meaning to not only this life but to your understanding of the life that is to come? Who is Jesus in your life? What is it about him that only God could have revealed to your understanding?

What makes your heart sing out, Hosanna! What makes you call out to Jesus for salvation? Don't just follow the crowd. Don't be compelled by the enthusiasm of others. You need to ask God to reveal to you, who this is?

When I was a child, Jesus was a character in a book read to me in Sunday School. But there came a time in my life when that was not enough. I was no satisfied with only knowing about Jesus. I want to know him personally. The crowd was no longer enough, I needed some one on one time. That one on one time with the living Christ transformed my life, my thinking, my understanding of who I was and who God was.

Many of us have been given a spiritual gift, time as we shelter in place. Christ is with you. Spend time together. Figure out for yourself, Who is this?

Let us pray: Come into my heart. Come into my heart. Come into my heart Lord Jesus.
Come in today, come in to stay, come into my heart Lord Jesus. Amen.

John Wesley borrowed the idea of a love feast from the Moravian church as a way to worship when Holy Communion was not available. In fact you had to get a ticket from your class leader to attend in those days. Today you do not have to hold a ticket. Everyone in your home is invited to share in these moment of shared love.

Let us pray: Be present at our table Lord; be here and everywhere adored; these creatures bless, and grant that we might feast in paradise with Thee. Amen.

I John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

As you share in the sweet bread with one another, share with each other words of love and grace.

Now as you drink from your cup remember the love of others that have been a blessing to your life through your years upon earth. After the service you may even wish to share some of your stories about how their love has blessed your lives.

Let us pray: There is nothing stronger than love. The love You have for us, that never gives up on us, but encourages us as we grow slowly into the likeness of Your son, Jesus. And nothing is stronger than the love we have together as your church in Valley Forge and as families that gather together. Bless us in this love today and always. Amen.

Now may God bless you all this week.
May the Lord's love give you strength during days of trial.
May this love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
keep you safe in his care always. Amen.