

# Reflection for Palm Sunday – March 24-2024 Hope Rides with Him

## Inspired by Mark 11:1-11

It was all good on the surface. It was all glorious. The anticipation palpable. The crowds gathered with excitement. Here comes the one who will really make a difference.

They must have wondered if the stories were true. Did he really upset the tables in the temple and chastise the moneychangers? What gumption, what bravado!

Were the stories of his healing powers authentic? Can we see the man whose sight was restored? Would the hemorrhaging woman be near Jesus upon his arrival, so we could get a first-hand account of her story? Perhaps the cured leper would be present, and we could gaze upon his healed skin.

All were wonderings of those that gathered to get a glimpse of the man Jesus, the Messiah. Perhaps they thought, perhaps we might be able to touch him also, and in doing so, acquire some profound heavenly connection.

Perhaps they also thought, look out Caesar, here comes the son of God who will put things right. It has been prophesized that David's throne will be re-occupied. Tyranny and oppression will be vanquished. There is going to be big change. Watch out Caesar, your time is over. We are going to have a new king! Hallelujah! Hosanna in the Highest, The Prince of Peace is coming!

But they did not appreciate what was to come, betrayal within his own inner circle, arrest and trial, Peter's denial of even knowing him, his sentencing and ultimate execution. They did not foresee what standing in solidarity with Jesus would require. They could not go to the cross with him. They simply could not do it and so they shouted, "Crucify Him," when Pilot asked what should be done.

It is easy to give initial enthusiastic support for a cause, get caught up in the emotion. But that can change abruptly when we really understand what it means, when we realize what kind of commitment is required, or when we are likely to face conflict.

Discomfort or potential self-sacrifice causes us to back away, even when what we pursue is worthy or admirable. To a large degree that's what happened that Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. A lot of his followers got cold feet. Why incur the wrath of the governor? To follow Jesus was folly. Why put oneself in harm's way? The fear of reprisals was real. Onlookers could see themselves along side Jesus on a cross. And that prospect would have been very frightening indeed.

So, we might wonder then why the memory of Jesus didn't vanish with his death. How was it that some actually saw his resurrected body and spoke with him? How is it that after more than 2,000 years we still follow a Resurrected Jesus in our lives urging us forward in justice work and in pastoral ministry? What is it that keeps us faith-filled when there is more and more chaos around us each day? What is keeping us from giving up when we are constantly bombarded by news of war casualties, starvation, riots, gun violence, deaths from drug overdoses and climate disasters?

I would love to hear all of your answers. Personally, I think it is because there was something other than Jesus on the colt that morning.

On that very first Palm Sunday Jesus did not ride into Jerusalem alone. Hope rode with him.

Directly in the face of adversity, hope rode forward then. When the crowds saw this man, they dared to believe, and a spark was ignited. After his death it fizzled and lay dormant for a time, but it never really went out. Throughout the centuries Hope has found its way into ghettos, refugee camps, and tent cities. The Hope, which is Jesus' ministry has freed the enslaved, fed the hungry, provided shelter to those in need and comforted the lonely and disheartened. It has helped to resolve international grievances and motivated activists and peace makers. It has helped countless face another day when this life has seemed unbearable.

Hope rides with us today and every day we stay committed to our discipleship call. That call is simply to love one another as brother-sister, regardless of real or perceived differences, regardless of our social standing, regardless of our ethnicity or cultural values, regardless of our colour, sexual orientation or our "otherness." When we do that, we alight the spark of Jesus' love again, praying that it may grow into a great bonfire, burning away the weeds of oppression, coercion and injustice.

Those embers of hope were scattered among the crowd that shouted "crucify him." They stayed with those who betrayed Jesus. And they stayed with those who quietly left the scene wondering what might become of them. They stayed, they smoldered and then they burst into flames again.

That's reminiscent of our journey towards Easter.

A very promising entry of goodness, kindness and generosity was stifled shortly after Jesus arrived to palm branches waving and crowds cheering. A Maundy Thursday celebration later this week commemorates Jesus's last meal with his disciples. We fall then upon Good Friday, the day of the crucifixion. Those days the spark flutters and is nearly extinguished. Then comes the revelation of Easter, when we are reminded that Jesus lives again, the spark is now a flame. Hope is born again.

Hope rode along with Jesus that first Palm Sunday. Hope resides in the Jesus of this Palm Sunday. And we know his spark will never be extinguished as long as we remember his commandment to love one another.

Together we can blow life upon those embers. I wonder what sort of bonfire we might ignite?

Thanks for listening this morning. Amen

1 Hope came riding on a donkey,  
    hope came riding into town;  
hope for peace and justice making,  
    hope for healing to lay down.  
All that gathered, waved and shouted,  
    Maybe Jesus was the one;  
Who could vanquish pain and suffering,  
    on to live or on to die.  
But all the morning sang his praises;  
    waking birds and dancing wind;  
here he is, the Son of David;  
    riding on to take his throne.