

Reflections for Palm Sunday April 5, 2020 - Will it be Hosannas or Crucify Him?

Text Mark 11: 1-11: As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples,

2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

3 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'

4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it,

5 some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?"

6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it.

8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.

9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

10 "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

This is the Lenten journey we will never forget. Never in our lifetime have churches and all places of worships been unable to gather in community on Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is usually the time when we celebrate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. A time that leads from triumphant celebrations to the sorrows of Golgotha. This year though, the Coronavirus has changed the trajectory of our lives in such ways that it seems as if we will be staying much longer in Golgotha.

In this situation we are doing church differently, using one form of social media or the other. Some of us are live streaming, others like me, are sending out written prayers and scriptures along with some form of reflection. We are all trying our best to say in touch with our communities of faith.

With all the changes that are taking place within our communities, our country and the world, is it possible to celebrate Palm Sunday? We gather in various ways to reflect, to ponder and to see if we can come to some understanding of who Jesus is for us especially at this time. We want to follow him now more than ever. We want to be part of the crowd who shouted "*Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" We want to experience how it feels to be caught up in the moment. We want to experience Jesus in a new and meaningful way. Is it possible to authentically celebrate this day as it was intended to be?

In the reading from the Gospel of Mark: The story is called "*Jesus enters Jerusalem as their long-awaited king.*" This is where Jesus offered himself not as a king who would fight to deliver Israel from Roman captivity but rather as her long-awaited Messiah. In the other three gospels, they also mention that the people took palm branches and went out to meet him shouting hosannas and praising God. Mark's gospel places the emphasis on Jesus sending his disciples to borrow a donkey. A direct quote from the prophet Zachariah 9:9, "*Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*"(NIV)

It makes sense that the people recognised Jesus as the one who comes as their long-awaited King or Messiah of Israel.

The disciples were joyfully praising God for all the things they had seen and heard. They shouted "*Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the king of Israel.*" Mark and John

recognised a kingdom but could not see beyond the here and now. So, they portrayed an earthly kingdom with a King or Messiah who comes to save the people. While Luke portrayed a heavenly kingdom over an earthly one where God's Peace and love reign.

My question is this, what lessons did the disciples learn then, and what can we also learn today? Here is the strong message of hope which we can share with each other no matter what the circumstances may be. There is always someone ready, willing and able to lend a hand, just like the owner of the donkey. Someone will be there at the right time and in the right place. How many of us would have known who the Lord was? Yet it is clearly understood that the owner of the donkey knew who Jesus was.

"The Lord needs them." How many people in Jerusalem knew who Jesus was? Could the owner of the animal be a secret follower or supporter of the Jesus Movement? If the owner of the donkey did not know who Jesus was, then many more questions would be asked. Scripture does tell us this; all we know is that the donkey was there for that very purpose.

The question that is pulling at my heart today is "Was this really a triumphant entry for Jesus?" It is here we get a glimpse of Jesus entering the city; a city he knew well. The city of Jerusalem, the very place where he would be rejected and later killed. Here we are more than two thousand years later reflecting on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem while confronting the heart wrenching Coronavirus Pandemic. What stories will we share with our children and their children, what legacy will we leave for those coming after us?

In my weekly calls to members and friends of our church community the one common thread is the COVID19 virus. This pandemic is leaving its mark in stories of social isolation and physical distancing. There is a yearning for personal contact especially for those living alone. Yes, there are phone calls and they are great, but no one can come to visit. Some spoke of their children and grandchildren waving when they drop off their groceries and medications. While others speak of having brief talks at the door through the glass. One member mentions "There is silence and everything seems dead. We can only watch so much TV, do so much house work or read so many books. What is going to happen to us? Will we survive? If so, what effect will this have?"

Will we as a church be prepared to handle these after effects? Jesus experienced glory and shame, success and failure, happiness and sadness, excitement and disappointment, ups and downs, highs and lows. In many ways feelings we can all relate to especially now that we are all in self isolation. The church has a unique message to share and that is to "keep hope alive". Hope in knowing that the One who endured crucifixion in Jerusalem is with us and nothing and no-one can separate us from his love.

As we journey through these challenging times let us walk together within our communities, country and world. Together we will shout "Hosanna! Hosanna! We will not succumb to the crowd of unbelievers who a few days later turned around and shouted, *"Crucify him, Crucify him,"* when their material expectations were not met. They were hoping that Jesus would be a king who would descend with military might and power and destroy the Roman occupation. A king who would restore national pride and glory to Israel. When Jesus failed to meet their expectations, they turned against him and shouted *"crucify him, crucify him."* What reason will we have to shout, *"Crucify him, crucify him"?*

It is my prayer that as we enter this very unique and different Holy week, we will find space to listen and see where the Spirit is leading us. Let us open ourselves to see how these stories will fit into our lives, especially as we move through these difficult days. What message of hope can we share with our communities and with those we love at this time? Will it be a resounding "#FlattenTheCurve!"

There are signs of hope springing up all around us in chalk messages on walkways and driveways, posters in windows and on trees. People are now recognizing the workers who are truly essential. The people that are keeping us safe and who are the heroes amongst us. There are many examples of people who are paying it forward. People are kinder toward each other. Like the women of Southern Africa who never gave up during the HIV AIDS Pandemic we too will rise again. We will celebrate with songs of thanksgiving as we sing *“Hosanna! Hosanna!”* rather than *“Crucify him, Crucify him.”*

May God’s justice and love rain upon us, today and always. Amen!

Prayer for the day:

God of love and life: we come this day laying before you our palm branches.

We Come with that which is dried out and lifeless. We come knowing that we are confronted by fear. Yet we know if we lean into the promises you made with us through our ancestors we need not be afraid.

Drive away our fear and give us new life in you, O God.

We come today seeking hope. We come with a surety that will dispel all shadows and despair. Most Holy and Loving God, we pray for those who are suffering with the Coronavirus, be with their families and with all medical personnel. Give them strength to face each new day.

Sweet Gentle Spirit we pray for those who are struggling with loneliness caused by isolation at this time. May each one near and far experience your grace in knowing that your promise for us, is everlasting life. Amen!

Hymn: My Jesus I love thee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LPLxV3qxBO>

Those of you who are able, please click on the link, in order to listen to the music. If you are unable, please see words. If you are unable to listen to the music, read the words that are provided, as you do, think on them.

1. My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine; for thee all the treasures of life I resign.
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art thou; if ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

2. I love thee because thou hast first loved me, and purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;
I love thee for wearing the thorns on thy brow; if ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

3. In mansions of glory and endless delight, I'll ever adore thee in heaven so bright;
I'll sing with the glittering crown on my brow; if ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.