

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Palm Sunday, March 28, 2010

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Hymns: 161, 55:4-5, 160, 163, 57:5-7.

Lessons: Psalm 118, Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 21:1-11.

Sermon Text: Mark 11:1-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Doesn't it happen often that something we expect doesn't turn out the way we expected it? That once we get into an event, it doesn't fulfill its promise?

If an observer were to impartially examine a book containing just events in Jesus' life and death from the event in our sermon text on the day we call Palm Sunday up until his burial on Friday before sunset and not have any clue about what Jesus himself had said and done previously, or what had been written in another book, the Old Testament, they would surely marvel at how lousy things turned out for Jesus.

Certainly, they might find in some of the events of the week we call "Holy Week" some reason for the leaders of the Jews to not like Jesus, but I doubt that they would think their planning to murder him and the ultimate execution of Jesus on Friday afternoon would be in any way justified. In fact, such an observer might marvel at how public opinion of Jesus changed from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem until his crucifixion. Today we look at just the first part of that week,

THE WELCOME BEFORE THE EXECUTION

- 1. Jesus arrives humbly, on a donkey.**
- 2. He is welcomed into Jerusalem**
- 3. *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!***

This was not the first time Jesus had come to Jerusalem but it was one of the last, and Jesus knew what faced him. In Mark's gospel three times he had already explicitly told his disciples that he would suffer and die there and on the third day rise again. So he went, ready to carry out the Father's will and to redeem mankind by his suffering and death. His disciples confess him as Christ, but they did not fully understand what that meant. He had been called the Son of David and the Son of God. In this entry to Jerusalem he acknowledges that he is all of those things but not in the sense the crowd or even the disciples understood it. Many of the events in these last days of his life were not understood properly by his followers until after his ascension.

"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 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. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go." This parade very likely began late in the morning and lasted late into the afternoon. On this day Jesus leaves the village of Bethany, located on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives about 2 miles from Jerusalem, with his friends. The road goes through Bethphage, which means 'house of figs'. The road crosses over the Mount of Olives, which rises some 300 feet above the city of Jerusalem.

As Jesus approaches this village, very close to Jerusalem, he sends his disciples to get a donkey for him to ride on, as foretold in Zechariah: *"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter 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.

They did as he told them. Perhaps the owners of the colt even knew Jesus as "*the Lord*" and thus permitted Jesus' disciples to take the colt. Perhaps Jesus had even made a previous arrangement with the owners to use this colt when he needed it. We don't know all of the details. He gives instructions: simply say *'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'* What a simple invitation to serve the Lord God! Everything happens just as Jesus said and certainly that strengthened their faith in him.

"When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it." Now this is a colt on which no one had ever ridden. The animals had no saddles, so Jesus' disciples threw their garments upon both animals, because they did not yet know which one Jesus would choose to ride.

"Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields." This is where the name "Palm Sunday" comes from: the palm branches they spread in his path.

"Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!'"

What Jesus is doing is immediately apparent to the people who follow him, and those who meet him. This event was foretold centuries earlier in the Scriptures. The King of Zion, a term used by the other evangelists for the Messianic king from David's line, entered Jerusalem amid praise and glory. The phrase 'daughter of Zion' refers first of all to the people of Jerusalem, the people of Israel. But in a broader sense, Zion is often used to refer to the inhabitants of the heavenly Zion, that is, all believers, the Holy Christian Church. This is not the entry of a warrior king who brings destruction with him. He is a king of peace. Thus there is no cause for fear; instead, people rejoice because this king shall deliver Zion from sin, death and the devil.

Mark only mentions one animal, other evangelists mention two. The colt would not likely have gone anywhere without its mother. But Jesus had to fulfill the literal prophecy of Zechariah. For sacred purposes, animals must always be selected which have never been used. What could be more sacred than to carry the Son of God into Jerusalem to begin his passion, his suffering and death?

When Jesus mounted the donkey, the people with him approached Jerusalem. They were met by another procession from Jerusalem. In Jerusalem people had heard about the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Many knew that Jesus now permitted himself to be saluted as the Son of David. They may have wondered if he might even accept the title of King. So the masses set out to meet him. They greet him joyfully. Some spread their clothes on the path, others scattered branches from the palm trees in rejoicing. The people are overjoyed at the arrival of the Messianic King in Jerusalem.

Look at this procession, this parade. This was a king? He could have asked the Father for 12 legions of angels as his personal attendants. But this act is also symbolic of Jesus' great humility and peace. This shows again that Jesus' Kingdom is not of this world. Through his very humiliation, Jesus shall subdue the enemies of his kingdom. This was a strange way for Jesus to be acknowledged as the king of Israel. He didn't ride a magnificent white stallion. Jesus didn't wear a kingly robe or a royal crown or hold a scepter in his hand. His attendants included Galilean fishermen. This did not look much like a royal procession but the multitudes were moved to shout things like *"Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"* Matthew 21:9.

The kings of the earth conquer by power and armies and strength and weapons of death and destruction. Jesus shall be victorious while he would seem to surrender. He must die in order to conquer death. But remember the ultimate glory of Jesus sitting on the right hand of God for all eternity.

Jesus deliberately rode into Jerusalem in this humble manner. His riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt also demonstrated that he was not a Messiah in the political sense, as many hoped, but he was the humble servant of his heavenly Father. The real meaning of Jesus coming to Jerusalem is found in the prophecy of Zephaniah: *"Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.'"* Zephaniah 3:14-16.

"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" These words plainly point to Jesus as a King. Jesus is the Messiah-King not just because he was a descendent of David, but because he is that king of David's line whom God promised repeatedly in the scriptures.

Hosanna means 'save, O Lord', or 'save us, O Lord'. We don't know how well the crowd really understood the significance of their own words. No doubt there were some who knew and believed that this is the one who came in the name of the Lord. But it is unlikely that they really understood the true nature of Jesus' Kingdom. We certainly do not find any multitudes honoring Jesus on Good Friday when he was so horribly mistreated, beaten, condemned to death and crucified. We are told later that even the disciples did not grasp the full significance of the event as it was happening.

Yet, the fact remains that on Palm Sunday crowds proclaimed the truth. Some of their words come from Psalm 118, our Old Testament lesson. The one who comes in the name of the Lord is blessed by God. He comes in obedience to the order of God, as God's messenger, with God's authority.

Doesn't the praise on this day sound like the praise of the angels when Jesus was born? **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."** Luke 2:14 (KJV). Peace! Praise and thanks to God for all this! These words are not merely wishful thinking, but an accomplished fact. Now there is peace. God has been merciful to his people in their distress. He sent a Savior and on this day, they confess him as the Savior. But they don't all realize the true significance of their own words. They don't really recognize the kingdom that Jesus represents. Not even the disciples understood all these things before Jesus was glorified. But Jesus now accepts their honors. Previously when people wanted to make him king he withdrew from them. Now he accepts their praises. He knows that the hour set by the father has come, and when they reject him in a few days, they will know the one whom they crucified.

The people are rejoicing but much of their joy is really superficial. It won't last. A few days later the people, perhaps many of these same people, also join in the cry "crucify, crucify!"

Jesus was aware of this coming change in the people's attitude. Jesus views the city. At the foot of the Mount of Olives, he sees Gethsemane, where he will wage a great struggle with the prince of darkness and pour out the blood of his sweat. He can no doubt also see Golgotha, the place of a skull, where his cross will be raised.

This may not seem a very spectacular parade to us, who may have seen many parades with many people and many displays. But this entry into Jerusalem is a picture of our Savior. This is a symbol of our entry into heaven, which will not be nearly so humble.

"Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve." We are reminded of Jesus at 12 years old being about his Father's Business in the temple. And that is where he spent much of the next 4 days, Monday through Thursday, in his Father's house. Mark records that the cleansing of the temple actually took place on the next day, Monday. Jesus looked around at what was happening in the temple and of course he knew what was going to happen the next day, when he would cleanse the temple, overturning the tables of the money changers and those who sold doves.

We ask that the deeds and the words of Palm Sunday march right into our hearts, so that we too may acknowledge him for what he is. We celebrate by praising the king who redeems us. We celebrate by looking forward, looking beyond the sufferings and death, remembering the real reason for the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. We look forward to his ultimate victory, his resurrection which we will celebrate one week from today! Amen