

Psalm 31:11-18 ¹¹Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors and an object of dread to my closest friends- those who see me on the street flee from me. ¹²I am forgotten as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. ¹³For I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side!" They conspire against me and plot to take my life. ¹⁴But I trust in you, LORD; I say, "You are my God." ¹⁵My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me. ¹⁶Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love. ¹⁷Let me not be put to shame, LORD, for I have cried out to you; but let the wicked be put to shame and be silent in the realm of the dead. ¹⁸Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.

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?' say, '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.

PALM SUNDAY IS A STRANGE DAY BECAUSE IT INTERRUPTS THE MORE SOLEMN VIGIL THAT IS LENT.

IT WAS ON THAT DAY JESUS MADE HIS ONLY PUBLIC DISPLAY OF ENTERING THE CITY OF JERUSALEM.

HE ARRANGED FOR A DONKEY TO BE PROVIDED, AND HE ENTERED WHILE CROWDS OF OTHER PEOPLE WERE ALSO GOING THERE.

THE PEOPLE SAW HIM AND CHEERED, THEY SANG, AND LAID CLOAKS AND PALM BRANCHES DOWN TO WELCOME HIM.

IT WAS A DAY OF JESUS' TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM, AND YET IT SET THE STAGE FOR HIS CRUCIFIXION.

LATER THAT WEEK PASSOVER WOULD BEGIN, AND LATER THAT WEEK JESUS WOULD BECOME THE TRUE PASSOVER LAMB.

SO THIS INDEED IS A STRANGE BEGINNING FOR HOLY WEEK, WHICH IS THE LAST WEEK JESUS SPENT ON EARTH BEFORE HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

JESUS RODE ON A DONKEY SYMBOLIZING HE COMES IN PEACE, BUT HE WAS GOING TO WAR. AND NOT AGAINST ROME LIKE HIS SUPPORTERS HOPED AND HIS ENEMIES FEARED.

HE CAME TO CHALLENGE BOTH THE RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL POWERS IN JERUSALEM.

BUT EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, JESUS CAME TO CHALLENGE THE FORCES OF SIN AND EVIL, OF SATAN- WHO IS THE REAL POWER BEHIND ALL WORLDLY POWER AND MIGHT.

THIS WEEK IS ABOUT OUR REFLECTION ON CHRIST'S BATTLE ON THE CROSS, AND THE VICTORY OF HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

AND SO TODAY IS A STRANGE DAY, BECAUSE WE KNOW THE JOY OF THE CROWD WILL NOT LAST FOR LONG.

WE KNOW WHAT IS TO COME FOR JESUS: HIS BETRAYAL, DENIAL, AND ABANDONMENT BY JUDAS, PETER, AND THE OTHER DISCIPLES.

JESUS WILL BE ARRESTED, TRIED BY BOTH A JEWISH AND ROMAN COURT. HE WILL BE CONDEMNED BY THE JEWISH COUNCIL.

HE WILL BE JUDGED INNOCENT BY PILATE, AND YET PILATE WILL HAND HIM OVER TO SUFFER AND DIE ON THE CROSS ANYWAY.

CONSEQUENTLY, IT SEEMS A LITTLE OUT OF PLACE TO SING HAPPY SONGS AND WAVE PALM BRANCHES IN CELEBRATION.

INDEED, CONSIDERING WHAT WILL HAPPEN LATER THIS WEEK THE PARADE INTO JERUSALEM SEEMS INAPPROPRIATE FOR THE BEGINNING OF HOLY WEEK.

PSALM 31 DRAWS OUR ATTENTION TO THE PROCESSION THAT WILL OCCUR AT THE END OF THE WEEK WHEN JESUS CARRIES HIS CROSS TO GOLGOTHA.

THEN, HE WILL LEAVE JERUSALEM LIKE HE ENTERED, TO THE SHOUTS OF THE CROWD. BUT IT WILL BE THE WRONG KIND OF CELEBRATION.

ON FRIDAY MANY PEOPLE WILL NOT SHOUT CHEERS BUT JEERS, DEMANDING, "CRUCIFY HIM! WE HAVE NO KING BUT CAESAR".

AND YET WE DO CELEBRATE TODAY BECAUSE GOD DID ANSWER THE PSALM'S PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE, FOR JESUS ALSO.

GOD DELIVERED HIS SON NOT FROM, BUT THROUGH THE UNFAITHFULNESS OF FRIENDS, HUMILIATION, SUFFERING, AND DEATH-BY RAISING CHRIST FROM THE DEAD.

A KEY STATEMENT FROM THE PSALM EXPRESSES THAT JESUS KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING. IN VERSE 15 IT SAYS: "MY TIMES ARE IN YOUR HAND."

THE MEANING OF THAT PHRASE IS THE AFFIRMATION THAT WHAT WILL HAPPEN IS UNDER GOD'S CONTROL, AS INDEED IT WAS FOR JESUS.

THE SAVIOR, OF COURSE, WAS AWARE OF THIS, FOR HE ALLOWED HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY AND MISSION TO BE DIRECTED BY HIS FATHER'S WILL RATHER THAN HIS OWN.

SURELY JESUS TIMED HIS ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM AS CAREFULLY AS SCRIPTURE SUGGESTS HE DID, ARRIVING IN THE VICINITY SHORTLY BEFORE THE PASSOVER FESTIVAL.

THE DONKEY ITSELF WAS A DELIBERATE SYMBOL, WHICH THE JEWS WOULD UNDERSTAND, ACCORDING TO ZECHARIAH 9:9.

IT SAYS IN THAT VERSE ABOUT THE MESSIAH- "REJOICE GREATLY, O DAUGHTER ZION! SHOUT ALOUD DAUGHTER JERUSALEM!

LO, YOUR KING COMES TO YOU; TRIUMPHANT AND RIDING ON A DONKEY, ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A DONKEY!"

IF WE THINK ABOUT IT, WE HOPEFULLY WILL REALIZE WHAT AN AMAZING THING IT WAS FOR JESUS TO- DELIBERATELY AND OPENLY, WITHOUT SPEAKING A WORD, DECLARE HIMSELF TO BE THE MESSIAH.

REMEMBER, THROUGHOUT THE GOSPELS, AND IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK IN PARTICULAR, JESUS MADE AN EFFORT TO KEEP HIS IDENTITY QUIET FROM EVERYONE EXCEPT THE TWELVE.

BUT ON THIS DAY, FIVE DAYS BEFORE HIS CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH, THE TIME HAD COME FOR JESUS TO GO PUBLIC, AND THE PEOPLE LOVED IT!

OR RATHER THEY LOVED THE THOUGHT JESUS MIGHT BRING BACK THE KINGDOM OF DAVID BY DEFEATING ROME.

THUS IT COULD BE SAID THE PALM SUNDAY CHEERS WERE EXPRESSIONS OF FALSE HOPE AND NARROW MINDED IDEAS THAT THE MESSIAH WOULD BE A NATIONAL HERO.

THE PROBLEM WAS, JESUS HAD NO INTENTION OF RESTORING THE KINGDOM OF DAVID, BECAUSE HE HAD COME, INSTEAD ON BEHALF OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

IT IS IRONIC, THEREFORE, THAT THE CROWD'S "HOSANNAS", WHICH LITERALLY MEANS "SAVE US NOW", WOULD BE ANSWERED, BUT NOT IN THE WAY THEY THOUGHT.

FOR JESUS HAD COME TO BRING A DIFFERENT KIND OF SALVATION, NOT JUST TO BENEFIT ISRAEL, BUT THE WHOLE WORLD.

JESUS CAME TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE AND ALL PEOPLE FROM THEIR SIN. HE CAME TO DO HIS FATHER'S WILL AND NOT TO MEET HUMAN EXPECTATIONS.

THE SAVIOR CAME NOT TO SAVE THE JEWS FROM ROME, BUT TO SAVE THEM, AND TO EVEN SAVE THE ROMANS, FROM SIN.

THEREFORE, JESUS CAME TO BRING PEACE, THE PEACE THAT PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING, BY REFUSING TO SAVE HIMSELF WHEN HE COULD HAVE DONE SO.

FOR CHRIST'S, IS PEACE NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES PEACE, NOR EVEN THE KIND OF PEACE THE WORLD DESIRES, YET IT IS THE PEACE THE WORLD REALLY NEEDS.

JESUS CAME TO MAKE PEACE BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANITY, BETWEEN THE HOLY ONE AND SINNERS-BY DYING ON THE CROSS.

THEREFORE THE PALM SUNDAY PRAISE OF "HOSANNA", WHILE PROCLAIMED IN IGNORANCE WAS, AND STILL IS, A FITTING SONG TO SING TO JESUS THIS DAY.

WE SING AND CELEBRATE BECAUSE JESUS DID BRING US SALVATION, PEACE, AND PROVIDES US WITH AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY.

JESUS SHOWED A COURAGEOUS DETERMINATION TO DO GOD'S WILL, AND HE TRUSTED IN HIS FATHER TO DO THE REST.

THIS BRINGS US TO CONSIDER WHAT THIS STRANGE DAY AND THIS STRANGE WEEK HAVE TO DO WITH OUR LIVES.

A PALM SUNDAY POEM, WRITTEN BY LOYD TALOR SAYS:

"THEY SHOUTED WITH PRAISES REACHING THE SKY, PUSHING AND SHOVING TO SEE JESUS PASS BY. CRYING "HOSANNA, GLORY TO THE KING! HE COMES TO US TODAY GREAT JOY HE DOTHS BRING."

THEY THREW DOWN PALM LEAVES, COVERING THE WAY. MAKING A PATH CLEAR FOR HIM TO TRAVEL THAT DAY. RAISING JOYFUL VOICES AS PRAISES FILLED THE AIR. THEIR DAY HAD COME, GOD ANSWERS PRAYER!

BUT IN A SHORT TIME THEY CHANGED THEIR CHANT, FROM JOYFUL NOISE TO A MOB'S HATED-FILLED RANT.

FROM HOSANNA, HOSANNA, AS WHEN HE WAS PRAISED, TO CRUCIFY HIM CRUCIFY HIM, AS THEIR ANGER BLAZED. IN DISBELIEF WE MIGHT QUESTION WHY THEY TURNED? BUT MAYBE THE QUESTION IS, WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?"

THERE ARE, IN FACT, THINGS WE CAN LEARN FROM THIS DAY, AS WELL AS WAYS WE ARE CHALLENGED BY EVENTS OF THIS DAY, ALONG WITH THE REST OF HOLY WEEK.

FIRST, WE ARE REMINDED THAT PEOPLE CAN BE FICKLE, WE ARE EASILY SWAYED, PARTICULARLY IN A MOB, TO SPEAK AND ACT FOR GOOD OR FOR EVIL.

THE PALM SUNDAY AND GOOD FRIDAY CROWDS REMIND US TO BE WARY OF THOUGHTLESS RESPONSES TO ACTIONS OR WORDS, ESPECIALLY BY THOSE WE ADMIRE.

HOLY WEEK ALSO TEACHES US THAT SALVATION, IS ON GOD'S TERMS, AND IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MILITARY, POLITICAL, NATIONAL, OR FINANCIAL SECURITY.

NOR IS SALVATION, AS GOD DEFINES IT, A MATTER OF ONE'S PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT, OR FAME, OR ANYTHING WE CAN GAIN ON OUR OWN.

INSTEAD SALVATION IS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST ALONE, AND IT WAS EARNED BY HIM- FOR US.

AND SO WE ARE CHALLENGED BY THE GOSPEL PASSAGE TODAY TO RECOGNIZE HOW THE JERUSALEM CROWD GOT IT WRONG.

WE ARE ALSO CHALLENGED TO CONSIDER THE FACT THAT WE MAY NOT ALWAYS GET IT RIGHT EITHER.

THIS IS A GOOD WEEK TO REFLECT ON HOW MUCH OR LITTLE WE HAVE LEARNED FROM THE ENTHUSIASTIC, BUT MISGUIDED PALM SUNDAY CROWD.

IN OTHER WORDS, DO WE HAVE ANY EXPECTATIONS ABOUT HOW GOD WILL ANSWER OUR PRAYERS, OR KEEP HIS PROMISES THAT ARE MORE FOCUSED ON OUR WANTS THAN GOD'S WILL?

INDEED, PALM SUNDAY, AND ALL OF HOLY WEEK, CHALLENGE US TO ACCEPT THE FACT WE CANNOT HAVE THINGS OUR WAY WHEN IT COMES TO GOD'S LOVE AND MERCY, GRACE AND PEACE.

NOR CAN WE DEFINE JESUS' ROLE IN OUR LIVES OR THE LIVES OF OTHERS. INSTEAD WE ARE MEANT TO LEARN THAT WE ALL ARE DEFINED BY JESUS.

FINALLY, A REFLECTION ON TODAY'S GOSPEL PASSAGE CHALLENGES US TO LOOK AT OUR OWN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD, SAYING:

"PALM SUNDAY IS A GREAT DAY TO THINK ABOUT WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO WELCOME JESUS INTO OUR HEARTS."

DO WE WELCOME HIM LIKE THE PALM SUNDAY CROWD DID? OR DO WE WELCOME HIM ON HIS TERMS, RATHER THAN ACCORDING TO OUR OWN TERMS?

JESUS CALLS US INTO A DEEP RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM BEYOND SUPERFICIAL PRAISES OR WORSHIP.

HE SEEKS A REAL AND SUBSTANTIAL PLACE IN OUR HEARTS AND LIVES, NOT OUR LIP SERVICE.

ON THIS WEEK SO LONG AGO, JESUS SHOWED HIS COMMITMENT TO GOD, HIS FATHER, AND HIS COMMITTED LOVE FOR US-BY HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH.

MAY WE BE WILLING TO COMMIT AND RECOMMIT OURSELVES TO HIM.

A VERSE FROM A PALM SUNDAY HYMN EXPRESSES ONE WAY WE CAN RESPOND:

"HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST! THAT ANCIENT SONG WE SING. FOR CHRIST IS OUR REDEEMER, THE LORD OF HEAVEN OUR KING. O MAY WE EVER PRAISE HIM WITH HEART AND LIFE AND VOICE. AND IN HIS BLISSFUL PRESENCE ETERNALLY REJOICE."

INDEED PRAISING THE LORD WITH OUR LIFE, AS WELL AS HEART AND VOICE IS TO WELCOME HIM NOT JUST ON SUNDAY OR OTHER HOLY DAYS-BUT EVERY DAY.

LET US PRAY: GRACIOUS GOD, GRANT US THE WILLINGNESS TO WELCOME JESUS, BY FOCUSING ON HIM AND HIS LOVE FOR US.

OPEN US UP TO YOUR TEACHING AND YOUR LOVE, SHOW US WHERE WE HAVE GONE ASTRAY IN THOUGHT, WORD, OR ACTION, AND IN WHAT WE HAVE NEGLECTED.

TEACH US YOUR WAYS, AND SEND YOUR SPIRIT TO HELP US LEARN WHAT YOU DESIRE US TO KNOW AND DO.

OPEN OUR EYES AND EARS, TO CHRIST'S PRESENCE WITHIN US AND WITHIN OTHERS, SO OUR SOULS MAY FIND THE PEACE HE BRINGS.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS, OUR SAVIOR, WE PRAY, SAYING HOSANNA, BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: PSALM 31:11-18 & MARK 11:1-11

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