

Worship Service for March 28th: Palm / Passion Sunday

- **Old Testament:** Isaiah 50:4-9a
- **New Testament:** Mark 11:1-11
- **Psalms:** Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Announcements:

- Welcome to our worship service! We're glad you are reading. We pray that God's blessings and peace will be with you all now and forever! Amen.
- Bible study will resume on March 31st. Time: 7pm; Place: St. David's. We will be studying James 2.

Sermon: Palms And Passions!

Our passage takes place during the Jewish Passover celebration. Passover was a great spring festival at the heart of the Jewish life, which is celebrated to this day. The Passover is a feast that celebrates the Exodus, the time when God set His people free from slavery in Egypt, through the sacrifice of the lamb and the crossing of the Red Sea. As far as they were concerned, Passover was freedom time. But it was also kingdom time: it was the time when Passover dreams, the great hope of freedom, of God's sovereign and saving presence being revealed in quite a new way, would at last come true.

Jesus and his disciples were among those coming to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem and Jesus knew that it was time for his ministry to be fulfilled. Jesus decides to enter Jerusalem riding on the colt of a donkey. When he enters into Jerusalem, he is given a King's welcome. The people spread their cloaks on the ground for him to ride on and wave palm branches in the air celebrating Jesus Christ as the King who comes in the name of the Lord, the kingdom of their father David.

In the Middle East, it was not a common thing for people to spread their cloak on the ground for anyone because their ground was quite dusty and stony. The only time this was done was for royalty. And the last time they did something similar was two hundred years prior when Judas Maccabeus defeated the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes, and then entered and cleansed and rebuilt the Temple. The people celebrated him, waved palm branches and sang his praises.

In celebrating Jesus as royalty, the people were saying both that Jesus was the true King, come to claim his throne, and that this was the moment when God would set

Israel free once and for all. According to the gospel of John, the great crowd that followed and celebrated Jesus did so principally because he had raised Lazarus to life and the news had spread abroad.

In the midst of their praises, they insert a powerful prayer: *“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 heaven!”*

‘Hosanna’ is a Hebrew word which mixes passionate and vigorous praise to God, praying that God will save His people and do so right away. When they sang “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, in Hebrew and Aramaic, they were saying ‘welcome to the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’

After all the festivities, the story ends in an interesting and slightly disappointing note. Someone reading this might have been anticipating something great to come, maybe even a coronation ceremony. But all we are told is that, *“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 happens for a reason. Jesus is about to radically redefine kingship. This is not going to be the sort of royalty that either Israel or the rest of the world were used to. Contrary to the expectations of the Israelites Jesus did not just come to be their rescuing king, he came to be the Savior of the whole world.

Jesus came into the world, because God so loved the world. He has other sheep to find and rescue and rescue the lost sheep of Israel as well. His death will deliver not only the nation but also the children of God throughout the world. It was not by accident that we saw some foreigners last week seeking to meet Jesus.

It was for this reason that the Pharisees and religious leaders rejected him, and some Jews still reject him today. This raises several questions for us as Christians and followers of Jesus today:

- Are we loyal followers of Jesus?
- Are we ready to put our personal possessions at his disposal, in order to obey his orders even when they do not make sense to us?

- Are we ready to go out of our way to honor him, finding in our own lives equivalents of cloaks to spread on the road before him, and branches to wave to make his coming into a real festival?
- Or is our familiarity with his presence breeding contempt in our lives causing us to neglect and treat as meaningless our Christian commitment and devotion to Jesus?
- Do we look to Jesus as One that we can come to only for him to meet our needs and provide us with comforting religious experiences?

It is so easy for us to get caught up with the things of this world and allow ourselves to slide into the pagan views of what divinity and kingship consist of and these views will make it difficult for us to fit Jesus into them. In case we are not used to kingship or have forgotten what true kingship looks like, the apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:5-11. He instructs us to have the same attitude as Jesus,

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

In his incarnation and on the cross, Jesus has done what only God can do. We are therefore invited to start from Jesus himself and rethink our whole picture of God and being followers of Jesus.

Jesus says, “when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.” As we watch Jesus’ journey into Jerusalem and on to meet his fate, we ourselves must be drawn into the action, and the passion that awaits him. And we too must ourselves become part of the means by which his message goes out to the world. May God grant us grace and help from the Holy Spirit to be part of this great kingdom revival. In the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers

Creator of the universe, Redeemer of all creation, you made the world in beauty, yet too often it is filled with ugly realities. We trust that you are at work in all situations, restoring and renewing all things. On this day, we find the courage of Jesus inspiring so we pray that those in need will find such courage, too, as your gift to make a difference in the challenges they face. Hear us as we bring to you our concerns and send your redeeming power to touch our lives and your world once more.

God of all hopefulness, God of our lives. On this holy day of Palms and Passions and through this the holiest of weeks, when our Lenten journey finds its completion through pain, sorrow, despair, illness, losses of all kinds, through fear, anger, hatred, bitter criticisms and finger pointing.

We come to recognize the varied ways we work against you, O God. Against your hopes and dreams for creations, against your love poured out in flesh and blood. We hang our heads and bow our hearts seeking your forgiveness, yearning for your guidance and desiring your compassion. Fill us we pray, with the ability to turn to you. Kneeling before you, may your grace open our spirit that we may let you in, receive you and take You into our hearts and minds and souls, let you in that we might turn and return to you, that we might be transformed in you, through you, by you and for you.

Transformed once more, this day, this week, into a new self, may we become a new people, a gentle people, a people of love and compassion, born anew from our deepest sorrow through the breadth of your forgiveness and love. And then, may we do likewise. Forgive and love one another.

Wherever people are oppressed by the powers of poverty, sickness or grief, ease their pain and restore them to wholeness. Wherever people challenge regimes or systems marked by tyranny and brutality, encourage them with your Spirit and lead them to liberty.

Wherever people are burdened by the weight of hostility, greed or jealousy, restore their strength to resist and show them signs of hope. Wherever people are persecuted because of race or creed, or for the truth they tell; let your truth and justice prevail.

Wherever the earth cries out because people consume too much and ignore the danger signs, Wherever care for the ground and water, for endangered climate and endangered species defies human carelessness, let your love for the goodness of creation move the hearts of your people.

We pray for your church in every place, whether it be fragile or strong, tired or energized. Inspire us with your Holy Spirit to offer ourselves in gratitude for the gift of Jesus Christ, serving creatively and courageously in his name.

Lord Jesus, we offer our gifts to God in your name. Compared with the gift you gave for our sakes, what we can offer seems so small. Bless our gifts with your love so that they have power to accomplish more than we can even imagine for your sake. Receive our humble thanks and bless our lives, too, so that what we do and say will show we have the commitment to follow you, whatever the cost.

Now we pray as Jesus taught us saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

As we enter this week, may we hold fast to God's vision of goodness, receive peace from the practice of justice, equality from the practice of respect. And as the week unfolds, may we let ourselves be overtaken by God's love and pour it back out into the world. And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus now and always. Amen.