

Scriptures: Philippians 2:5-11, Luke 19:28-40

## **Palm/Passion Sunday**

Today is Palm, or Passion, Sunday in the Church calendar. Oftentimes we tend to focus – like we are today – on the palms. That’s a natural thing for us to do. We like focusing on happy times. On the fun, and don’t care much for the sad times. This is also called Passion Sunday, because it kicks off the final week of Jesus’ journey to the cross.

It’s truly a bittersweet day. In it, we see all the pageantry and fanfare of a King riding into town, and because we know the rest of the story, we know what’s coming next for the One who loves us most. Betrayal. Denial. A terrible beating, the shedding of righteous blood on Calvary, and His dead body sealed in a borrowed tomb.

We’ll have ample opportunities this week to talk about these aspects of Jesus’ final week up to and including His crucifixion. I hope you’ll join us here on Thursday evening at 7:00 to remember again His Last Supper, and that you’ll tune in on Facebook on Friday afternoon around noon to hear and meditate on His crucifixion and burial. If you brought your Bible with you, or have a Bible app handy, turn with me to chapter 19 of Luke’s gospel, looking at the 28<sup>th</sup> to 40<sup>th</sup> verses. We’re going to look at his account of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. **Read Luke 19:28-40.**

## **Locations**

Our gospel lesson opens shortly after Jesus had went to Zacchaeus, the tax collector’s house, and He had told a story of servants – some faithful, and some not. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem (verse 28, paraphrase). The text mentions a couple towns – Bethphage and Bethany, in verse 29. All of these locations would be in what’s called the West Bank today.

Bethphage was a village on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Jericho was a little town east of Jerusalem along the Jordan River. Bethany, where Lazarus, Martha, and Mary lived, was located about two miles southeast of Jerusalem. Luke also makes mention of the Mount of Olives, which he later records is where Jesus ascended into Heaven.

The Mount of Olives is a mile long ridge that runs parallel to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and is separated from it by the Kidron Valley. It’s a steep cliff which separated the old city of Jerusalem from the surrounding countryside to the east. At some point later this week, in Holy Week, we’ll talk about Jesus going out to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Does anyone know where that is? It’s located on the Mount of Olives. Apparently Jesus liked the view there!

Jesus tells two of His disciples to “Go to the village ahead of you, and 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 untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it,’” (Lk. 19:30-31). Of course, everything happened, just like Jesus said it would. That things

happen the way Jesus says they will shouldn't surprise us, but the business with the colt should.

## **Riding a Colt**

In their gospel accounts, John and Matthew both record Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. A colt is a young male donkey. What's significant about that? Well, for starters, when we think of Kings or great presidents, what do we envision them riding? Horses. For instance, there are numerous statues and paintings of George Washington riding a beautiful gray horse he named Blueskin.

Instead of riding in on a horse – what we would expect – Jesus chooses to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. Another reason this is important, is because of how people in those days would have viewed this action. In the book of 1 Kings, the very first chapter, David is very old, in the process of dying. One of his sons, Adonijah, decides he's going to be king in David's place. He throws a big party, and gets all the military leaders who had helped his dad secure the kingdom to come to it.

They're having a grand old time, until they hear the news. "Our lord King David has made Solomon king. The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites, and they have put him on the king's mule, and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon. From there they have gone up cheering, and the city resounds with it. That's the noise you hear. Moreover, Solomon has taken his seat on the royal throne," (1 Kings 1:43b-46). Once they heard the news, the party ended pretty abruptly!

So a king riding into the city on a donkey to be anointed – we'd say crowned today – is somewhat of a tradition in the history of the Jewish people. "They [the disciples] brought the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks on it, and put Jesus on it," Luke records (19:35). Make no mistake friends, the crowd on that first Palm Sunday knew exactly what the donkey meant, and what Jesus was publicly saying about Himself. So did the political and religious elite of the day. We know this because, "As He went along, people spread their cloaks on the road," (verse 36), Luke tells us.

## **Praising God**

What happens next in the story? "When He came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen," (verse 37). When we think about Jesus' disciples, we get stuck in a mindset of just assuming the Bible's talking about the twelve disciples. It's a generalized term here. In Scripture, we usually see the twelve disciples called "The Twelve," or "the Apostles."

What we see in the text today, though is just "disciples," meaning people who generally followed Him. Like followers on Facebook, we might not know them personally, but maybe we know of them. This was probably the same sort of thing. By this time in Jesus' ministry, there were hundreds, maybe even thousands of "disciples" of Jesus. He fed 5,000 men, and later fed 4,000 more. Some of these may have been there.

He interacted with and healed ten lepers, one of which came back to thank Him. Maybe that leper was in the crowd. Or the man who had been possessed by many demons, who Jesus set free. Or maybe the woman who was at the well. Or the dead man, Lazarus, who was called out of his tomb four days after he had been buried. Or blind Bartimaeus, who hadn't been able to see, and Jesus gave him sight. Think of all those miracles we've read about Jesus doing in Holy Scripture – these are what they're praising God about, along with other miracles I'm certain that Jesus performed which weren't recorded by the writers of the gospels, and I'm sure some of these folks were there that day.

## **Telling The Story**

They're giving eyewitness accounts of what they've seen as they were heading down the road that day. They're telling their personal stories of how their individual lives have been changed by having an encounter with Jesus Christ. Do we do that? We need to do that more – and in a more public way than we have gotten accustomed to. If people get offended, they get offended – the Church needs to be unafraid to tell the world what Jesus Christ has done for it, and what He's going to do! We should be people who “Love to tell the story!”

These disciples – these followers of Jesus – they're on the road, shouting with joy and thanksgiving to God. Picture that. A huge crowd of people shouting in joy and praise. Maybe even singing and dancing. They're throwing their cloaks down on the road in front of Him. Some of them don't have cloaks, so they're climbing palm trees and ripping down branches to wave and scatter on the ground before Him. They're shouting a refrain that had been around since the time of the prophets and the kings of old – part of it even from the Psalms – “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in Heaven and glory in the highest!” (verse 38).

That's what the world needs to see the Church do today. In all the chaos and strife – rather than being sucked in and pulled down with it and by it – the Church should be a beacon of light and hope. A people who are joyful and joy-filled even in the midst of intense suffering and personal struggles. The world is desperate to see us as living witnesses of the transformative power Christ alone gives. He changes us – and they need to see it out there. He turns these sick, decaying, sin-ravaged jars of clay into beautiful masterpieces.

## **Works of Art**

There's a form of artwork in Asia – Japan I think, and I don't remember the name of it – where when bowls, vases, dishes, or teacups happen to crack they fill in the cracks with thin veins of gold, so that the fragile item is usable again. It's a very beautiful process. That's what we are, Church. Broken, fragile jars of clay, that in the Master's nail-pierced hands, have been repurposed and given a transfusion of “liquid gold” into our veins from the blood of the One who gave Himself up for us on the cross and left the tomb empty. He patches us up with His own Holy Spirit living inside us, and equips us to do every good work that He's laid out for us to do – if we're willing to do it.

Our passage today closes with a bit of a complaint, and Jesus' response. It's still true today – as they say, “haters gonna hate.” “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!’” (verse 39). In other words, “Jesus, tell Your followers to settle down. We don't want them stirring up trouble.” And of course, by extension, they're also telling Jesus, “You aren't the King we want.” Why would they? They had a lot going for them, with the cozy relationship they had with the Roman authorities. If Jesus becomes King, He'll mess up the relationship. When somebody messes up our relationships with others, what do we tend to do? As humans, we tend to write them off – get rid of them. And they did get rid of Jesus, just a few short days later – or so they thought.

People still do that. If you're following Jesus, you may have ran into old friends, who see you, think you're still the person you used to be, and when you don't get into the stuff that you once did, they can't understand it. You may hear things like, “Oh! You've turned into an old fuddy-duddy!” Or, “wow you're boring!” It's better to be “boring” with Jesus, than to be “fun” without Him, Amen?

### **Called to Tell of God's Glory**

Jesus responds to the Pharisees, “I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out,” (verse 40), which is a quote from the prophet Habakkuk. Habakkuk was a minor prophet who was a contemporary of Jeremiah, and witnessed the Babylonian exile of the Kingdom of Judah. Of Babylon, which is very applicable to many nations today, and which Jesus quotes here, Habakkuk said, “Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin! You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea,” (Hab. 2:9-14).

Babylon, Assyria, Rome, they were built on bloodshed and fell. Nations today are in the process of building themselves up by shedding blood – these nations, too, will fall. But New Hope, we – the Church – are called to fill the world with the knowledge of God's glory revealed through Jesus Christ, and to hail Him as the true King. That's what Jesus needs us to do for Him in our day. And that's what Palm Sunday is all about: Recognizing Jesus as the King, who loved His people so much He was willing to take the nails to redeem them! Thanks be to God!

**Prayer:** Almighty God, You are the Light and Life of every soul, and our Only Source of hope. Grant that in following You today, we would experience Your transformative power shaping us into Your faithful people, prepared to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout the world. In His name we pray, Amen.