

Sermon – March 28, 2021  
“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord”  
The Rev. John C. Wright

Text: Mark 11:1-11

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen*

Good morning. Welcome to Palm Sunday. Before we look at this morning’s scripture, I want to give us a last opportunity in the season of Lent to share anything that we have on our hearts from reading and listening to Jesus’ words this past week or from any of the time you have been reading and listening. Does anyone have some words from Jesus they have been given to share this morning? I am still reading the Gospel of Luke, and this week one of the parables I listened to Jesus tell was the parable of the prodigal son. The words that stood out for me were Jesus’ description of the father’s reaction when, while his son is still far off, he sees his son coming. The NRSV text is “... his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.” And I will be honest with you, when I read those words, I get a picture in my mind of how I was looked for by God the Father who sent his son to die for my sins so that I might be able to turn and begin that journey back to the Father, a Father who looked for me even when I was a long way off. And when He saw me coming, trudging with a heavy burden of sin, trying to come to Him, He sent Jesus to lift my sins and carry them, and He ran and wrapped me in His arms and welcomed me with a kiss. I was welcomed into the kingdom of God as this prodigal was welcomed into his father’s house, with extravagant love. I hope that we will all continue to read the Gospels in the coming year and listen for Jesus to speak to us as we read. Let me encourage all of us to continue to listen for Jesus’ voice speaking to us through the scriptures. Any time we hear Jesus speaking to us, I pray that we will come and share with this congregation what we are hearing.

Let’s look at our Palm Sunday text from Mark. Context is important for our encounter with God’s word this morning. We will find it helpful to recall that just before Jesus’ arrival at Jerusalem, he was in the town of Jericho with this crowd which has now paused close to the

summit of the Mount of Olives. And, as they were leaving Jericho, Jesus restored the sight of a blind man. That blind man joined with the crowd following Jesus and quite possibly for the first time in his life is about to see Jerusalem, the temple mount, and the magnificent temple structure. If there is anyone in this crowd with reason to give praise to God and to Jesus, it is the blind man. Mark does not tell us that the praise that comes from the crowd starts with this man, but I suspect that his praise to God will be great. We should also remember that what follows Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, in Mark's Gospel, is the cleansing of the temple. This is the context in Mark for this morning's scripture.

Jesus has stopped the crowd traveling with him a short way before the crest of the hill. Those of us who have climbed a mountain know the anticipation that will be building in this group of weary travelers who have walked the fourteen miles from Jericho and have climbed up some 2500 feet to this summit. What awaits them on the other side of the mountain summit is a view that will move their hearts as they behold the Holy City. They have come to the city of David, to the temple, to join with millions of others to celebrate Passover.

Jesus summons two of his disciples and sends them on a task. They are sent into the village just ahead to find a colt that is tied and to untie it and bring it to Jesus. Notice that this is not a suggestion that comes from any of the disciples or those in the crowd. The retrieval of the colt has nothing to do with the climb, walk, or Jesus being tired. Jesus is teaching his disciples something. Jesus is teaching us something. Jesus is arranging actions that will fulfill the scriptures about God's Messiah. Jesus is revealing, to those who will see, who he is, the anointed one of God. The disciples obey and go without asking a question as to why they are being sent. They go, find the colt, and speak the words Jesus gave them when people in the village challenge their untying of the colt. And in due time they return, bringing Jesus the untied colt. Jesus' disciples will not forget this stop on their climb and his request for the colt. It will take the gift of the Holy Spirit to lead the disciples to a scripture, Genesis 49:10, to later make sense of this stop on the road to Jerusalem. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the disciples are later able to connect Jesus' actions here in the untying of the colt with the prophecy from Jacob about Judah found in Genesis 49:10. There they found a colt tied to the good vine. The untying of the colt and bringing it to Jesus connects this prophecy to Jesus and speaks directly to who he is, the Messiah. Notice also that this colt has never been ridden. This attribute means that it can be used for a sacred purpose. That purpose is to carry the anointed one of God, Jesus the Messiah.

Cloaks are thrown on the colt's back and it tolerates Jesus sitting on it even though it has never borne a rider. And then Jesus moves forward towards the summit, towards Jerusalem, riding on the colt. We should understand that pilgrims coming to Jerusalem did not ride animals into the city. The tradition was for them to walk the last part of their journey from their homes to the city. They were to come on foot into Jerusalem. So, among the millions of people that come to Passover, Jesus alone is mounted on a colt riding this part of his journey to Jerusalem. Jesus being mounted on an animal is a clear marker of who he is, a king. Jesus did not ride animals during his ministry; he walked, yet at this moment he decides to ride into Jerusalem. This marks Jesus as a king. Jesus comes as a king, not as a victorious king mounted on a white charger, but as a humble king on the colt of a donkey. Jesus' actions point to something new and unusual taking place during the coming Passover.

With Jesus mounted on a colt, the crowd that is following him once again joins the flow of Passover travelers streaming into the city. Jesus and his followers move forward again, cross the summit, behold the city of David, the holy city, the temple mount, and the magnificent structures of the temple. As they see this sight and with Jesus riding on the colt, those in front and behind him break out in praise. "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" These words of praise would be normal for many who come into the city during Passover. The joy of being at the center of the Jewish worship during this week of Passover, where they will celebrate the one true God's action to save Israel, would bring forth praise to many pilgrims' lips and those praises would be from the psalms. These praises could be heard all around Jerusalem on the roads as travelers came to the city. The sound of praise is not unusual; the presence of Jesus mounted on a colt is unusual. Those who witness this progression seem to join in the praise, and some take off their cloaks and place them on the ground before Jesus for him to ride over. This is the traditional way of welcoming a new king in Israel. Its origins go back to the coronation of Jehu where his comrades took off their cloaks and spread them on the ground for him to walk on as he accepted the kingship of Israel. Others around Jesus go to the fields and bring leafy branches to place on the road, another indication that a new king has arrived as ruler in Israel. This moment in Jesus' ministry, his arrival on a colt to the rejoicing of Jerusalem, is also a fulfillment of prophecy about the coming Messiah. This moment fulfills the words of the prophet Zachariah. In Zachariah 9:9 we find these words, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Jesus fulfills this prophecy. He is the king to come, seen here riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey, surrounded by those praising God.

It is difficult to tell from the scriptures how far down the Mount of Olives this praise and procession lasts. What we can tell is that by the time Jesus arrives at the temple, a walk of almost two miles, there is no longer a crowd of those praising God for his arrival. The praise that began on the summit has not sparked a fire in Jerusalem and spread across the city. There is no growing praise for the arrival of a new king in Israel. Praise that should have spread throughout the city of Jerusalem, praises for a new king, humble and mounted on a colt has ended. Mark only tells us it late in the day when Jesus and the twelve arrive at the temple, and once there, no indication is given that the temple leadership welcomes Jesus with hosannas or any words of praise or welcome, or even notices this humble king’s arrival. What some in the crowds coming to Jerusalem may have recognized at the summit of the Mount of Olives has faded. Yet, Jesus has come to the temple; the Messiah has come to the temple, but there is no notice of his arrival. Jesus, followed by the twelve, looks around at everything in the temple, and then leaves. Jesus walks back to Bethany alone with the twelve. There is no more praise from the crowd with loud hosannas, no more cloaks thrown down on the way. The humble king has come to God’s temple and there is yet no widespread notice of his arrival. Jesus has made certain that his disciples will remember his arrival on a colt as a humble king, but much will change before they come to understand who Jesus is and how he will become ruler as a humble king.

This morning we celebrate Jesus’ arrival as a humble king in our worship with loud hosannas and recognition of Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. During Lent we have been those who are striving to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus into the temple, into our temple, into our hearts. We are those who look at this welcome of a humble king and now must ask ourselves, “How do we welcome Jesus into our temple, our bodies?” Are we filled with praise upon Jesus’ arrival and have we placed our cloaks, in the form of a fully surrendered heart, on the ground before him? Are we those who daily submit to his Lordship and, on bended knee, look to his rule in and over our temple, our lives? We also may be ready to welcome Jesus at the summit with others who give him praise, but when Jesus comes to our temple, our bodies, our heart, our soul, and our might and looks around, what does he find? Is our house, our heart, fully surrendered to

this humble king, or is there much that we have brought into the house of God that Jesus yet needs to drive out? Are we looking expectantly for a humble king to come and be in fellowship with us not just on Palm Sunday but every day? Are we ready to take up our cross and follow this humble king?

Mark's Gospel may be the best of the synoptic Gospels for providing an explanation of the transition of the welcoming crowd into a crowd which will cry out for Jesus' crucifixion in just a few short days. Perhaps only a few in the group with Jesus were praising God for the coming of a new king, and as the week progresses, this idea of a humble king becomes lost in the new cries of the crowd for something else. Maybe the cries of the crowd were more a response to their own selfish experience at seeing the grandeur of the Holy City and the idea of a humble king dying in their place is not an idea they could accept. They seem to have had no place for a humble king. What started in a manger as a child born in a humble way is now moving forward with this humble king's arrival in Jerusalem. This is not Jesus seeking his glory. Jesus is the king of the universe; what motivation could there be for him to come to be king of humanity? He did not come to be a king, one who rules as other earthly kings by taxing the people, building massive armies or magnificent temples to God. This humble king comes to rule in our hearts, to guide us into eternity, reconciled to God, and to lead us all into the kingdom of God. This is the kingdom Jesus comes to lead us to through belief, hope, and love. How could the one who is God's son, equal to the Father, the very Word made flesh, the one through whom all things were made, want to be king over humanity? Jesus does not seek to be a king to increase his power; instead, he has pity on us and loves us enough that he will suffer, die, and be resurrected so that we might be wrapped up in the loving arms of the Father and welcomed into the kingdom of God forever. As we go through this week, holy week, take time to read again the closing chapters of a Gospel or Gospels that detail this week that Jesus spends in Jerusalem. Listen as he teaches, hear him as he prays in Gethsemane, see him as he climbs Golgotha, watch as his body is placed in the tomb. See this humble king who comes mounted on a colt become the king of all by dying on a cross. Go with the women early on Easter morning and find the empty tomb. Listen as his disciples run to see the place where his body was laid. Be amazed that this humble king pays the price for our sins. There seems to be no place for a humble king in the lives of the crowd, in the temple in Jerusalem, or in the hearts of the leaders of Jerusalem. As we watch, listen, and

experience all that Jesus does this week, let us ask ourselves if we have a place for this humble king, if we will place our hearts before him and surrender all to this humble king.

*Pray with me: Lord, let our hearts be cast down before you without fear of the cost. Let our hearts be open to the coming rule of a humble king. Jesus, we welcome you into the temple of our hearts with great praise and thanksgiving. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen*