

April 9 2017

Reading from the Bible *Matthew 21:1-11*

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, “The Lord needs them.” And he will send them immediately.’ This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, ‘Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’ The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’

Sermon “The King Is Coming” (First few words are missing on the tape)

--Even though they brought in more pilgrims during the Passover, the celebration is remembered as deliverance from the oppressor. Beside the collusion of the Jewish leaders there was always real danger; apparently this parade must have gone just under their radar or appeared to be more innocuous in any case Jesus rode on. The people of Jerusalem were keenly aware of the Roman occupation and it was what they really wanted to be freed from. They were impoverished and many, many were below the poverty level. The tax rate was 30%. We would say that would not be too bad but if you have 30% of not much, it doesn't leave you with much. Crucifixion wasn't just Jesus, the Romans crucified thousands of people during the 70 or 100 years that they ruled this area. People were crucified frequently to remind those who dared to push the buttons of Rome.

If pilgrims went to the temple, they saw the beautiful temple and it loomed over them, but the people wanted to be free. But their King had arrived. Their King was here. They could celebrate—Hosanna- Save us! Come Help Us!

Was Jesus nuts? The dramatic invasion entry revealed to his disciples that he was putting himself out there. Jesus and his disciples were all vulnerable. The people were to receive him as King.

As Matthew often does he wants us to understand how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy and he quotes from Zachariah about the King coming in on a donkey- the foal of a

donkey. What we often don't know about that Zachariah passage is. It is in the middle of judging the enemies of Israel. God says I am going to show you the way the one who will rid you from your enemies. A very poetic prophecy if anyone put it together. Jesus was deliberate about this act. The scene was reminiscent of the Maccabees who many years before fought the Jewish enemies and when successful people waved palm branches in the parade for them. When the Pharisee put together the Zachariah prophecy, they certainly got it when they saw Jesus' next act which was to perform was to go into the temple and turn everything upside down in the temple. And Jesus declared that the temple was his Father's House and it was to be a house of prayer not of robbers. There was nothing subtle about that. We know from Luke's account that the Pharisee were not happy. They yelled, "Tell your disciples to stop this!" "Make your disciples stop this." "Stop this hosanna stuff." They wanted Jesus to blow the whistle on them. Jesus said even if everyone here was quiet here, the very rocks would cry out. Creation would cry out. This is my grand entry."

And here are the crowds again, the crowds and the Pharisees. The Pharisees feared the worst scenario was to draw the Roman's attention and then everyone would suffer. The Pharisees would lose their power and maybe their heads. What does the crowd want? They had been fed-remember the multitude and the loaves and the fish. Maybe in the crowd, there was somebody's brother who was blind and was healed, maybe some of them had been there and seen Nazareth come out of the tomb. They were witnesses to miracles and they had been fed and they had high hopes and expectations. The news of Jesus had spread fast especially after the raising of Nazareth. The bigger crowds said," Who is it? And they said, "Jesus— prophet from Nazareth and Galilee." What they shouted was very, very revealing. If you look at the four gospels there is a variety of things that were recorded, almost all of them have something to do with Hosanna with undertones of pleading for deliverance. Hosanna to the coming king. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel. Hosanna to the son of David. Hosanna in the highest. Peace from Heaven and Glory in the Highest. And in Luke he writes, they began to joyfully praise God in loud voices for all the miracles that they had seen. John says because the king has come particularly when Lazarus was raised. They recognized Jesus and they knew he was from Nazareth. They knew he was a prophet. They knew his name. They recognized him as a miracle worker as a bread provider. The Pharisees recognized him as their mimesis. They did not really get the full import of this dramatic statement. Jesus, looking into the future down the road was pretty cynical about this crowd. He saw them when they got fed and they had full bellies and they had followed again hoping to be fed again and now here they are celebrating jubilee. They hadn't put it all together. This gentle and humble king was riding on a donkey. There was No white stallion. There was No

black Arabian horse rearing up on his hind legs. There was no show of power. There were no disciples armed to the teeth.

I wondered why Jesus allowed these people for fulfilling this prophecy so publically, couldn't he have sneaked into town been with a little less putting himself out there. He didn't need the crowd did he? Did Jesus give his disciples one good day, I thought about this while waiting for Easter maybe this was one of the things that helped those disciples get through the future days or did it make it worse for them? Did Jesus see the dependence of Rome or was he that political or was to prepare Judas to betray him, to tip his hand to claim the throne by putting nose to nose with the powers? Did Jesus need this parade for himself after setting his to face for what was ahead in Jerusalem? Crowds are fickle as the story is told. Caring for the outcast, caring for the least, raising Lazarus maybe somebody could do that. That would be enough to sustain they loyalty as they would stand in the courtyard of Pilot egged on by those in authority yelling crucify him.

Palm Sunday 2017 the question still lingers, who is this man? And we must individually wrestle with an answer which is not just a classic textbook answer. This man Jesus demands an answer not just from our head from our heart. Jesus courageously made it plain that he is not just the anointed one, the Messiah but in his own concept, the claim of King of Kings.

We have to decide if we want a king who meets our needs. Do we want a king made rather in our own image in our own imagination who is preoccupied with our wants, our desires? Do we want that King or do we want a King like Jesus. Do we want a Savior meddling in our lives, and making things complicated? Gentle and humble are words that are not very popular today. Do we want to claim Jesus as king, when he was crucified? Do we want to claim Jesus as King when he says to us, take up your cross and follow me, find your passion, care for others be like vulnerable like me, go to the tough spots, and go against the grain. Take up your cross and follow me. Who is this man?

Let us pray: Gracious God, We too often we want Jesus to be our best friend. We want Jesus to be the one who hears all our needs and meets all our needs. And who agrees with us in our entire decision making. It is a lot harder to allow for Jesus to be both Savior and Lord. Help us in this Holy Week to recognize in ever deepening ways who this man is. Amen.