

Text: Mark 11:1-11

Theme: Save Us Now, O Son of David!

Date: March 28, 2021- Palm Sunday

Grace, mercy, peace and joy be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

As I said before; I can't tell you how happy and joyous I am to be here. Last year, we were not able to be in this very sanctuary. We still held the services; that is we recorded them, but it was different; so very different. It has been in many respects a very long and trying year. But, today, we are back in the sanctuary, by God's grace as we begin this holiest of weeks. We are back where we need to be, want to be, have to be. There is no better place to be than in God's house on God's day. Today, we ride with Jesus into Jerusalem as he victoriously and triumphantly enters Jerusalem on a donkey. To many people, however, it doesn't seem all that victorious and triumphant.

The Greek author Plutarch describes how kings are supposed to enter a city. He tells about one Roman general, Aemilius Paulus, who won a decisive victory over the Macedonians. When Aemilius returned to Rome, his triumphant procession lasted three days. The first day was dedicated to displaying all the artwork that Aemilius and his army had plundered. The second day was devoted to all the weapons of the Macedonians they had captured. The third day began with the rest of the plunder borne

by 250 oxen, whose horns were covered in gold. This included more than 17,000 pounds of gold coins. Then came the captured and humiliated king of Macedonia and his extended family. Finally, Aemilius himself entered Rome, mounted on a magnificent chariot. Aemilius wore a purple robe, interwoven with gold. He carried his laurels in his right hand. He was accompanied by a large choir singing hymns, praising the military accomplishments of the great Aemilius. That, my friends, is how a king enters a city; at least from a human perspective.

Today, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ also enters the city in a way that in all intents and purposes doesn't seem to compare with how Aemilius did it. But, looks can be deceiving. There are many clues in our text that show what Jesus is up to and what is truly going on as He rides into Jerusalem. Today, we pray that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes so that we can be strengthened in our faith as we make our way through Holy Week, through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and onto Easter.

What we see with our eyes on this Palm Sunday is pretty clear. Jesus is on a donkey that has never been ridden on before. He is riding not walking into Jerusalem. People are spreading the cloaks on the road. They are waving palm branches and they are crying out, "Hosanna." That is what we see. It all seems pretty straightforward.

But, certainly several questions come to mind. What is the point of today? Why is it so important? Why is Jesus riding not walking into Jerusalem? Why is he on a donkey? Why are they waving palm branches in their hands? Why are they crying out Hosanna and what does that mean? We will answer all these questions and more as we go on today. Open our eyes Lord, we want to see Jesus!

Let us begin today in a somewhat unconventional place and that is in the book of Ezekiel, a book that one certain member here today, whose name shall remain nameless, okay, it was Roger, was a huge fan of, especially chapter 37. The prophet Ezekiel was called by God to be a prophet for the children of Israel while they were in exile in Babylon. He describes in great detail what that was like for them. It was excruciating, defeating and deflating as they were forced to pack their bags and leave not on vacation but as slaves in strange land. And in chapter 10 and 11, Ezekiel describes the glory of the Lord that was also leaving the temple. Not only was God allowing them to be taken off into exile, but he was literally leaving the place where He dwelt in the Holy of holies in the temple built by Solomon. Talk about your grand exits. God was angry with them and He was packing His bags and He was leaving town.

Over the last year, at times, it seems to some as if God has abandoned us; like He has packed His bags and left town. We,

too, at times, have felt abandoned, lost, alone, deflated and defeated. But, as is always the case, God always comes back. He never leaves for long because His love and compassion always outweighs his anger and judgment.

In the book of Ezekiel, before the glory of God leaves completely, He rests for a bit on a very significant place, a place that is where our story begins and that is on the Mount of Olives. So, to start, when Jesus begins His journey today, where does He begin? That's right, the Mount of Olives. He is bringing the glory of God that left the temple in Ezekiel back to Jerusalem. Open our eyes lord! We want to see Jesus!

Second, why is Jesus riding not walking into Jerusalem? Why is He riding a donkey? Most of the time, Jesus walked where He went. If he had a Fitbit, I bet he would average tens of thousands of steps. But, today he is not walking. He is riding. Why? What is the point? Well, to help us understand that, we have to go back to 3 Old Testament passages. First, King David wanted to build a temple for God to dwell in, but God tells him that that wouldn't be his job. He says, in 2 Samuel 7: 12-14, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be

to me a son." So, God promises David that He will first give him special offspring. Second, He will establish His kingdom. Third, He will built a house. Fourth, He will establish His kingdom forever.

Second, in 1 Kings 1, it is revealed that Jesus wasn't the first King to ride a donkey. Kingdom Solomon also did so as he was coroneted as Israel's next King. He rode his father's donkey. Verse 37 says, "As the Lord has been my lord the king, even so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David."

Lastly, we hear in our Old Testament reading from Zechariah 9, "Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

So, it all comes together quite nicely. Jesus is riding a donkey, not walking to drive him a point. Bells and whistles should be going off. Neon signs should be lit up. A horn needed to be blasting. Trumpets blown. Jesus is making into abundantly clear what He is doing. It is a pretty rare sight to see someone riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Only kings got to do that. Jesus is saying that He is the promise made to David. He is the special offspring from David. He is the one through whom David's eternal kingdom would be established. He is the house that is God is going to build. He is the one Zechariah speaks of. No

more secrets! No more hiding! No more waiting! Jesus is riding into Jerusalem with one purpose and one purpose only. He wants people, especially the Jewish authorities to see who He is and what He is about to do. He was claiming loud and clear that He was the Messiah. Sadly, some people get the message but they were mistaken as to His true purpose.

Which leads us to the third and fourth questions that go together. What is the purpose of the palm branches and why are they crying out Hosanna? Palm branches were for a long time in many other cultures associated with victory and conquest; king of like waving a flag at a political rally. And, especially for the Jews, palm branches became associated with a desire for political independence. They waved them in solidarity so as to be free from tyranny. They wanted to be free from the Romans and they wanted Jesus to lead them there.

Which is connected very directly with the words, "Hosanna" the Hebrew word for "Save us now!" They wanted Jesus to save them from their earthly troubles. Save them from political oppression. Give them their country back! The same could be said of us. With all that is going on, we tire of all our earthly struggles. We want Jesus to give us an easier life; a life without all the suffering, pain and challenges.

But, Jesus did not come to be an earthly ruler. He did not come to be a political ruler. He did not come to make our lives

easier. He came to do what the prophet Zechariah proclaims, "Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Our real problem is spiritual. Our real problem is how we treat others. Our real problem is our failure to conquer our sinful urges. Our real problem is our desire to be number one. Our real problem is how we speak to one another. Our real problem is our pride, greed, rebellion and covetousness. Our real problem is the fact that we are mortal. Lord, open our eyes! We need to see Jesus!

But, again, the Jesus of Palm Sunday is a Jesus, I can get behind. The Jesus on Palm Sunday is humble but in that humility shows great courage. The Jesus on Palm Sunday is brave. The Jesus on Palm Sunday is resolute. The Jesus on Palm Sunday is determined. The Jesus on Palm Sunday is faithful. The Jesus on Palm Sunday rides into Jerusalem, knowing full well what awaits him. He knows full-well that His brazenness and directness are very clear to those that needed to understand. His decision would end up costing Him His life. But, that is exactly what needed to happen.

For Jesus came not to bring us political independence but spiritual independence. He came not to destroy the Romans but to destroy, and totally annihilate something far more sinister. He came to overcome the forces of sin, death and the devil himself.

He came to bring us back to the Father. He came to pay the penalty for our trespasses and iniquities. He came to live the perfect life and to die the perfect death. He came to bring us forgiveness, eternal life and ever-present salvation. He did take up a throne and He does wear a crown. He took up the throne of the cross. He wears now the crown of victory as He rose again and lives and reigns to all eternity.

So then, in our struggles, in our trials and in our tribulations, whatever they may be and as numerous as they can be, we cry out as those pilgrims did on that first Palm Sunday. "Hosanna! O Lord save me! O Son of David, give me courage! O Lord, Son of David, make me brave, resolute, faithful and true! Let me not give in or give up to the forces allied against me! Lord give me hope! Give me wisdom! Give me insight! Give me direction! Give me purpose!" Let me not give in to fear but have faith! Let me not be afraid or anxious but help me to put everything into your hands and trust Your almighty will! Give me humility and meekness to serve you.

Corrie ten Boom, a holocaust survivor, was once asked if it was difficult for her to remain humble. Her reply was simple. "When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments onto the road, and singing praises, do you think that for one moment it ever entered the head of that donkey that any



of that was for him?" She continued, "If I can be the donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in his glory, I give him all the praise and all the honor."

As we started today, we talked about Aemilius Paulus, who won a decisive victory over the Macedonian and when he returned to Rome, his triumphant procession lasted three days, showing art, weapons, the spoils of war and the family of his captor but this grand and glorious entrance into Rome can't hold a candle to what is going on today. Today, we see our Lord and Savior Jesus triumphantly and victoriously and gloriously riding into Jerusalem. He is riding there with courage and conviction. His enemies get the message but I pray: so may we! But, there is one final message that Jesus is sending to us. And, it is one that we need to look way into the future to truly see. There will come a time when Jesus will also ride in triumphantly but not just into Jerusalem, but into the world. On that Day, He won't be on a donkey, but maybe on fiery chariot. There will be the trumpet call of God. The dead in Christ will rise first and we will be changed, given our glorified bodies and live forever in the new heavens and new earth. Jesus' riding into Jerusalem points us to that joyful day. Again, we pray, "Open our eyes Lord. We want to see Jesus! Give us courage! Give us faithfulness! Give us wisdom! Give us strength! Help us to do what you would have us do until you come again!" In Jesus' name. Amen.