Palm Sunday – Who Do You Say I Am?

Matthew 16:13-16 Kimby Young

Mark 11:1-11 March 24 2024

Holy week begins with a parade and a party. Everyone is excited for the upcoming holiday – Passover. People in Jerusalem might be waiting for family to arrive – watching the roads expectantly. Faithful people from all over the world are making their way into the city. Imagine the different clothing and animals. The military and political leaders arrive on horseback with a full army of armor and chariots and flags proclaiming the power of Rome and their allies. Dignitaries, famous people, politicians, salesmen, story tellers and ordinary traveling families are arriving every day. People are watching the travelers as they enter, excited about who they might see. As our drama at the beginning of the service and our scripture from Matthew attest. There were mixed opinions about who Jesus was. Some thought he might be the Messiah, but others thought he was just a miracle worker or a teacher. And some, particularly the political leaders, thought Jesus was a threat to their own power and control. They feared he might draw unwanted attention from Rome and bring on repercussions.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, most people in the crowd didn’t know exactly who he was or what was happening. Jesus entered on a donkey – the animal representing peace, not the war horse of the Roman authorities entering that same week by another gate. Perhaps some people recognized this was the sign of the Messiah foretold in the prophets. Perhaps they didn’t know all of that. They welcomed a teacher, a leader. They cheered for a hero, a star, a famous person. Maybe some had heard Jesus teach – and they recognized his wisdom and authority. Maybe some had witnessed one of his miracles – and they felt the presence of God with Jesus, in Jesus. Maybe they anticipated the actions of the Messiah would be a revolution, an overthrow of an oppressive government. Maybe they were waiting to see what Jesus might do next. Maybe they just were excited to be in Jerusalem for a big holiday week and on the streets in a happy crowd. They shouted “Hosanna.” Which means Save us! But they really didn’t understand what that would mean. NONE of them, even those closest to Jesus, even the disciples - none of them knew what would happen in the week ahead. None of them anticipated an arrest, a cross, a death, a resurrection. None of them understood just how Jesus would save them… and save all of us.

But we know. We know what it meant for Jesus to enter Jerusalem. We know that Jesus knew what was about to happen – and it wasn’t anything like the crowd anticipated. Jesus knew he was about to die. Jesus knew that by entering Jerusalem he was entering the final week of his life on earth. Jesus knew that the week ahead would be painful, torturously painful, and not only because of the cross – but also because of the betrayal. Jesus knew also that his followers would face fear and doubt and horror in the days ahead. And he didn’t want that for them. Jesus loved them. He wanted to protect them. But Jesus knew what was about to happen. Jesus knew.

So as the crowd cheered and screamed and sang around him – Hosanna, Hallelujah, Save us! As the crowd laughed and ran along and gathered steam – imagine Jesus’ thoughts. This same crowd – or some of this same crowd – would shout “Crucify Him!” in just a few days. This same crowd would run away in fear. This same crowd, even his friends and disciples, would hide and pretend not to know Jesus. This same crowd would lose faith and would be overcome with doubt. Don’t you know it broke Jesus’ heart? Don’t you know as they laughed and sang, Jesus felt much deeper emotions? Don’t you know Jesus wanted to tell them what was coming, to teach them a little bit more, to touch their hearts, to reach them, to get them ready for the passion that followed? The passion - the strong and barely controllable emotion.

We know what the week ahead will bring. So when we shout or sing “Hosanna, Save us,” we know what that means. We know that Jesus saved us, by facing darkness head on. Jesus saved us, by taking on our sins and carrying them for us. Jesus saved us, by submitting to torture and death. But even in that death, transforming death so that it no longer has power over us. Jesus saved us, and saves us still, by bringing the power of God to human life, by offering us that very power of God. Jesus saved us, and saves us, by turning that darkness and fear and sin and death into light and hope and grace and new life. Jesus turned everything upside down. And Jesus does that again and again in our lives – reminding us that nothing has as much power as God’s love, and nothing can separate us from that love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So today, as we sing, “Hosanna, Save us,” we know what God has done for us. We sing it differently than that crowd on that first morning so long ago. Perhaps we sing it with tears in our eyes. Perhaps we pause. Perhaps our laughter is just a little bit deeper. Our hearts are moved. Because we know what Jesus did. We know the grace of God for us, and how that grace can transform our lives and our world.

We know the cost of salvation, the cost of the cross, the cost of grace. And we know that cost has been paid for us, so we don’t have to die or struggle or suffer or be afraid. We know Jesus loves us. We have hope in Jesus Christ. We have reason to rejoice and celebrate and wave palms and sing songs. We have reason to believe and live our faith. We know the power of “Hosanna, Save us.” We know the gift of God’s grace in Jesus Christ our Lord. We know.

As we enter this holy week ahead, enter with Jesus. Know how much Jesus loved the world, how much Jesus loves you. Remember that Jesus entered with open eyes to take on the suffering of the world. We are invited to enter with open eyes into the promises of God’s grace, to receive the blessing of truly knowing Jesus Christ Savior of all. Receive this gift of God today. For by God’s grace we are saved. Hosanna. Save us Jesus Christ! Give to God your thanks and praise. And go out sharing your Hosannas and Hallelujahs in the name of Jesus Christ our King. Amen.