

6th Sunday in Lent – Palm Sunday
April 8, 2017

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Mount Olive Lutheran Church

Theme: Who is this?

Text: **Matthew 21:1-11**

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ “Say to the Daughter of Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ ”

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

¹¹ The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

The Word of God we’ll focus on today is our Gospel reading from Matthew chapter 21. Let’s begin with prayer.

Lord Jesus in you the weak and timid find how meek you are and kind. How graciously you hear us and are forever near us. Hosanna! We now adore you, with praises bow before you. Amen. (Christian Worship hymn 134 vs. 3 alt.)

It seems like this time of year people are always asking the question, “Who is this?” when it comes to Jesus. Each year around Holy Week and Easter you’ll find magazines and books and T.V. shows exploring that question... and offering various answers... but of course this is not a new phenomenon... Throughout the ages people have asked the question, “Who is this?” when it came to Jesus. Even during the days when he walked this earth, people wondered exactly who he was... and what he was here to do.

From his birth to his childhood to his ministry... Jesus always seemed to make people stop and wonder exactly who he was and what he was up to. He was clearly a man... but more than just a man. The things that were said about him by angels and aged believers left his mother speechless. The things Jesus himself said to his parents, even as a boy, left them scratching their heads... just who is this? As he taught the people they asked, **“Who is this who even forgives sins?” (Luke 7:49)**. And as he performed miracles we heard his disciples wonder **“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (Mark 4:41)**.

And yet perhaps we wonder... well, how could they not know!? The angels told Mary and Joseph that Jesus was God’s own Son come to save his people from their sins. The ancient prophecies God had given his people all pointed to Jesus. His miracles and message testified that he was God in the flesh – come to help his people... and yet, just like today, Jesus found many people confused about who he was... and what he was really here to do.

Which brings us to Palm Sunday... the beginning of that week which would bring Jesus back to Jerusalem one last time... the week which would bring to its completion Jesus’ earthly ministry. Jesus had just recently performed perhaps his most remarkable miracle raising Lazarus from the dead in a very public setting. And word had spread. People were beginning to think they finally knew who this Jesus was and what he had come to do.

And so as he made his way up to the top of the Mount of Olives which overlooked Jerusalem, sitting on a hill across the Kidron Valley, Jesus found himself surrounded by not just his disciples but massive crowds. The Scriptures had foretold this moment, we heard it earlier today in our other lessons, when Zion’s King would come riding into the holy city on a donkey... as people gathered around and shouted words of praise and prayers for rescue to the promised Son of David – to the King who would make things right once again.

And yet... you wonder... even though the crowds on Palm Sunday praised Jesus that day... you wonder if they really understood what they were saying. As this huge group approached the city, they were asked what this was all about. We are told, **“The whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” (Matthew 21:10-11)**. Jesus certainly was a prophet... and they were right to hail him as their king... and yet by the time Friday would roll around you don’t hear the crowds shouting praise anymore, do you? It seems that what they thought Jesus was... what they thought he had come to do... well, it didn’t all turn out to be exactly what they had hoped for.

As we begin another Holy Week celebration it might be good for us to examine our own hearts as we consider who this Jesus really is... and what this last week of his public ministry was all about. Because the temptation is still very real for us to second guess who Jesus is and what he came to do... not so much because the Bible isn’t clear... but because the things we see in our daily lives, the struggles we face, the problems that seem like more than we can handle... they all can leave us wondering if Jesus really is the King who came to help his people... or if he was something less.

If Jesus really is our God and King then why do I still struggle with temptation? Why can't I find happiness in a relationship? Why are my parents divorced? Why is my dad dying? If Jesus has the power to get rid of them, then why don't all my problems just go away?

But if we find ourselves wrestling with these questions what can end up happening is that the events of Holy Week don't seem all that special to us either. Just like those first Palm Sunday crowds we can find ourselves disappointed by the end of this week because it doesn't seem like anything has really changed... And yet... just like on that first Palm Sunday... today too Jesus looks on his people with compassion and meets their needs even if they don't quite understand fully who he is or why he's there.

As Jesus reached the top of the Mount of Olives do you know what he saw? He looked out and saw Jerusalem. He saw his people. Just as he stands here today at Mount Olive and looks out on you... his people. You know, the Bible tells us that Jesus wept on more than one occasion when he looked out on his people because he knew they did not understand, that they would turn away from him, that in the end... they would kill him and reject him like they had done to so many of God's other messengers before. But this didn't stop Jesus from going down into the city and doing the kingly work he had come to do... nor does it stop him today from going down among you and assuring you of that work completed as he tells you about it in his Word.

You see, that work he completed was the reason he came... it was too small a thing for him to simply fill the stomachs of those in Jerusalem with food, or free them from government oppression... it was not enough even to heal their sicknesses or raise their dead... all those things would never address their underlying problem... our underlying problem of man's sin and the cursed and corrupted world that had resulted from that sin... and the eternal death that was waiting because of that sin... No the only way to destroy all our current problems and our eternal ones... was to do away with sin and its consequences forever. And that's what Jesus did.

This week you will see him lay down his life for us. You will watch him physically tortured and spiritually abandoned by God. You will see your King come to you righteous and having salvation... and then watch as he gives that righteousness away and becomes our sin to save us... to save us from eternal suffering far worse than anything you will ever face in this life.

And by the time we're gathered here on Easter Sunday I pray that you will no longer be wondering "Who is this?" and "Why is he here?" like the crowds of old... but instead will answer that question confidently because you have done this week what God himself encourages us to do all the time in his Word. He says:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2).

Brothers and sisters, you were that "joy set before him" ... the reason he went to the cross... everything you will hear about this week he did for you. And so when we hear people ask that question... "Who is this?" "Who is this who rides into Jerusalem today?" Well, we know the answer! This is... the King who wins the victory... the Prophet who speaks for God... the Priest

who made the ultimate sacrifice... this is Jesus: Our Savior and our God. **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!** Amen.