

April 2, 2023: Palm Sunday

Text: Matthew 21:1-11

Pastor Priewe

Theme: A Greater Kind of King 1) offers a greater kind of kingship 2) and inspires a greater kind of service from his servants.

There's a wonderful scene in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the most famous of C.S. Lewis's book series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. A boy named Edmund has betrayed innocent blood, his own brothers and sisters, lured by the guise of the White Witch's magically tasty pastries. He has also betrayed the Great Lion, Aslan, King of Narnia, and because of it the White Witch now has a claim on his life. "Every traitor belongs to me as my lawful prey and for that treachery I have a right to kill," she squeals. "His life is forfeit to me."¹ But then in a secret meeting with the Witch, Aslan the mighty lion intercedes on behalf of his little friend Edmund Pevensie. Though no one heard the proceedings, she releases her claim on Edmund's life. Everyone is baffled. No one knows what happened or why except the Lion. How he was able to arrange the release?

That night while all are sleeping, except two restless girls who follow behind quietly, Aslan, the mighty Lion, the great King of Narnia, walks slowly and mournfully through the forest to the great Stone Table where he surrenders himself to the White Witch and all her devilish minions. They bind him and they kill him. That was the arrangement he made—the blood of the Great Aslan, King of Narnia, exchanged for the blood of a traitor name Edmund Pevensie.

Who ever heard of such a thing? A King sacrificed and slain in place of little Edmund Pevensie. A true fairy tale indeed! Something only dreamed up in the fanciful imagination of a children's book, right?? No, you can see plainly the "source material" that C.S. Lewis had for his wonderful allusion in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. It was this week, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and of course, and if you know what happens in the book, Easter Sunday. And who was Aslan the great lion king of Narnia who sacrificed himself for the likes of Edmund? Where did he come up with a king like that. I'll give you one guess. It's the same greater kind of kind of king we are looking at today, the one who rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on a lowly donkey.

Today, as we look at Jesus, we'll see (*theme- A greater kind of king 1) who offers a greater kind of kingship 2) and inspires a greater kind of service from his servants.*

First, *we see a greater kind of king*, even than what the people were looking for. How many times didn't Jesus' own followers prove that they tended to want Jesus to be an earthly king, a physical Messiah who would restore the fortunes of Israel to that of the former glory of king David and Solomon. Jesus miraculously feeds the five-thousand and they want to make him king by force. He raises Lazarus from the dead and they're happy to show up with Palm branches and shout Hosanna as they usher their new king into Jerusalem.

But that's not the kind of king Jesus was, nor the kind of kingdom he had been proclaiming all along. All of that was too small. The people were setting their sights on something too piddly, but Jesus was a greater type of king. He's the one who can send his disciples ahead to find a donkey and it's foal that he knows ahead of time will be right where he says it is. And he gives the disciples the answer to the question he knows they will be asked when they untie the donkey, "Where are you going with my donkeys?" Then Say, "**The Lord needs them.**" **Matthew 21:3.**

That whole exchange is just showing us one more time that even in his state of humiliation where he has set aside the full use of his divine power, he is still "**in very nature, God**" as Paul says in Philippians. He's God, the king of it all. And because he's God, he's a

¹ C.S. Lewis. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. Chronicles of Narnia.* Harper Collins. New York, 1950.

greater type of king than this world has ever known. But that's the thing about him being God and being King. He doesn't need to conquer boundaries with battles and set up fancy gold palaces for himself. Heaven is his throne and earth is his footstool. He already owns it.

As a greater kind of King, he's interested in offering a totally different and 2) greater kind of kingship. He starts by setting all of his power and glory aside. “[He] **did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.**” (Philippians 2:6,7). Who ever heard of something like that? The king becomes a servant in place of his servants.

That's how we find King Jesus today on Palm Sunday, “**being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself.**” (Philippians 2:8). He rode into Jerusalem on a humble steed just as the prophet Zechariah had said, “**See your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**” (Zechariah 9:10). Jesus chose that humble steed because he knew it would be a tell-tale sign for the people to recognize him as Messiah and King. And they do, at least to some extent, they recognize him as the king they were long expecting to come, the heir of David's royal line. They offer their praise and the royal treatment of waving palms and spreading the cloaks on his path, all the while shouting, “**Hosanna to the Son of David!**” “**Blessed is who comes in the name of the Lord!**” **Hosanna in the highest heaven!**” (Matthew 21:9).

But perhaps the greatest question of this text is this—do they really get it? Do they see past the frenzy and the fanfare and see Jesus as their true Messiah, as a greater type of king?” Maybe there were some of those who were crying “**Hosanna,**” which means “Save us, please!” who actually did get it, but the gospel writer Matthew gives us a detail at the end that leads me to believe a great deal of the crowds did not get it. “**When Jesus entered Jerusalem, 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) Just Jesus the prophet, just Jesus the political messiah, the next hope for an earthly king, and even that was a little suspect since he was coming out of Nazareth of all places. That appears to be about the sum total of what the crowds were thinking.

Even if that's all they thought Jesus to be, Jesus himself knew what he was, a greater kind of king, and he was intent on offering them a greater kind service as their king. And so his donkey-ride ends with a detail I don't think I've ever really noticed or comprehended before. Luke's gospel tells us, “**As he approached Jerusalem and sees the city, he wept over it.**” (Luke 19:41). For everyone else that day, it's all Hoorahrah!!!, but Jesus begins weeping over the knowledge of how short lived and superficial their praise is. On Sunday, they shout “**Hosanna**”. On Friday, they'll shout, “**Crucify, Crucify!**”

Listen to the way this commentator, John Ylvisaker explains the sight that lay before Jesus as he's coming down the Mount of Olives, “*Reflecting upon the sin which Jerusalem was about to commit and the punishment which the city was bringing upon itself, He is completely overwhelmed. An awe-inspiring panorama lies spread before His eyes. At the foot of the Mount of Olives He beholds Gethsemane, where he must wage the last great struggle with the prince of darkness and pour out the blood of His sweat. Before Him, beyond the Kidron valley, lies Golgotha, the place of a skull, where His cross shall be raised. Within the lofty walls with the many turrets, He sees the great murder-city which shall bring Him to His death and so reward Him for all His actions of love and devotion, and will call down upon itself the most terrible*

*judgement. All this moves Jesus to tears as He rides into the city through the golden gate, while people sing hosannas in his praise.*²

Jesus is going to become “obedient to death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 5:8). He is going to offer his life as king for the sake of his servants, to bring them true peace and forgiveness for their sins. Even for traitors who sing “Hosanna” one day and shout crucify the next. That’s what his greater kind of kingdom is all about. Peace. Forgiveness. Christ’s rule established in our hearts, not by conquest but by sacrifice. He’s the king who conquers by surrender, surrendering himself. The Great King above all kings exchanged for a traitors like me. **That’s the greater kind of kingship of a greater kind of king.**

The question I have for you at the end of it all is this: “What will it do to you?” Will you view the great sacrifice of the king of all kings and leave here unmoved and unaffected? **“Hosanna!”** this morning and **“crucify”** by this afternoon. Or maybe instead of “crucify,” it’s **“I forgot and I don’t care.”** Will today just be about how nice it was to have all the kids waving their palms and singing, as wonderful as that was? No, it can’t be! When the great King like ours gives his life in sacrifice for the lives of us, his servants, it’s something we can’t ever forget. Our lives are now bonded to him. Every day we live becomes a testament to him and the peace he won for us. We are inspired to an even greater kind of love and devotion to our king. Our knees and our hearts bow to him and our tongues confess that he our Lord, the one God sent to saves us.

Our king also inspires a greater kind of service to each other. As Paul says, **“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...who made himself nothing, who became obedient to death on the cross.”** (Philippians 2:5.) This is how we show that we get it. We owe our Great King a debt, and though we can’t repay it, we show in our lives and in our relationships how much it means to us, how much it has changed our mindset.

At the end of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, once traitorous Edmund is found fighting in the great battle for Narnia so valiantly that he nearly comes to the point of losing his life for the sake of the brothers and sisters he once betrayed. The sacrifice of a greater kind of King inspired him to a greater kind of service in that kingdom. God grant it in our hearts as well. Amen.

Now thanks be to God who has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. Amen.

² Ylvisaker, John. *The Gospels: A Synoptic Presentation of the Text in Mathew, Mark, Luke and John*. Augsburg Publishing House. Minneapolis. 1932.