

**Palm Sunday's Texts:**

Zechariah 9:9-12

Philippians 2:5-11

John 12:12-19

**Our Hero  
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The gospel for this Palm Sunday is John 12:12-19:

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel!" And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

"Fear not, daughter of Zion;

Behold, your king is coming,

sitting on a donkey's colt!"

His disciples did not understand these things first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things have been written about him and had been done to him.

The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard that he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, for the world has gone out after him."

The gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ! Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we ask you to be king of our lives and of our world, to be our Messiah, on your own terms. We pray that you would help us to humble ourselves, even as you humbled yourself that we might too experience the exultation of being honored by God in ways that bring you honor and glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We come together today on this Palm Sunday or, as I like to call it, the Sunday of the Triumphal Entry. Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem for the last time and the text that we have say that the people who had come to the feast came out to greet Jesus. The feast we are talking about is the Passover feast. The people of Israel have come to celebrate the Passover. Now the Passover

is a time when the people of Israel remember and when we remember that God rescued the people out of slavery in Egypt and set them free. The language of the Passover is that God heard the cries of his people and he came to rescue them and set them free from the bondage that they experienced.

That's the celebration of the Passover that the people are gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate. And they're looking for another Passover. They're crying out again for God to come and free them from bondage to Rome. They're expecting a new Messiah to come and be victorious over the Romans and all that they do that oppress the people. But they're in the Promised Land, so their expectation is not for another exodus. Their expectation is for God to be victorious over the Romans and to throw them out, for the Romans to exit and for the people of Israel to reign and freely lead their lives in this blessed Promised Land that God has given them. They want victory over Rome.

Our text tells us and we celebrate this language by calling this day Palm Sunday. It was a warning in many respects. When John tells us that they came out with palm branches, we might see that there's a problem coming. Palm branches were a sign of Jewish nationalism. They were a celebration of the Jewish authority and state. The leaders of the temple, who know that full well, are actually in cooperation with Rome. They are working together with Rome. They've been given the freedom to practice and lead the Jewish people, as long as they keep the Jewish people in line. Their job during this Passover celebration, when Jews come from all over the world to celebrate, is to keep things calm and orderly. So they know that, as the palm branches start waving and as the fervor begins to grow, they have a problem that they need to deal with.

But the people. The people are excited. The people are shouting, "Hosanna!" They're shouting that their hero is coming. They're exalting Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the One who has indeed come to set them free. So they're honoring him. They're praising him. They're calling others to him. They're elevating him as their new king, the promised Messiah.

Perhaps they had forgotten the words of Zechariah. Perhaps they weren't thinking about the symbolism of the king riding on a donkey, humble. Not on a warhorse. Not with an army entering the city, but humble and riding on a donkey. Righteous and having salvation, he comes.

You see, the salvation that Jesus is bringing to the people of Israel, the salvation that Jesus is bringing for all the world is not victory over Rome. It's victory over sin and death. It's victory over our own rebellion. It's the victory that comes through the sacrifice of Jesus, so that we experience the forgiveness of Jesus.

The scripture tells us that the disciples did not understand these things at first. We only have this recorded in the gospel because, later, as they reflected back, they remember these things and the significance of them. When Jesus was glorified, when Jesus was raised, then, they remembered that these things have been written about him and these things have been done to him and that they fell in line with God's prophetic word. You see, what Jesus did was emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, not a king who would take charge, but a servant who would sacrifice his very life for us. He humbled himself. He humbled himself, even to the point of death, even death on the humiliating cross.

So as we journey in this walk from today into Holy Week toward Easter, it is my hope and prayer that you will take time on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday to worship and hear the rest of this story of what happens to Jesus as he goes into Jerusalem. How he upsets further the practice of the temple by throwing over the money tables and chasing the people out who were trading in the temple and reminds us that it's a house of prayer. How he gathers his disciples together, washes their feet as a servant, and says to them to do likewise for one another. How he celebrates the Passover and inaugurates the new Covenant in holy communion, as he gives the bread and says, "This is my body" and gives the wine and says, "This is my blood, the cup of the new Covenant to bring forgiveness of sins." How he sets them up to see what's about to happen, as he gives his life as a sacrifice for us.

We don't want to race ahead to Easter without experiencing and seeing what Jesus is bringing to us through his death and resurrection. We want to take the time to reflect on the enormous price that Jesus paid out of his love for us.

In 1 Timothy 1:15, it says this, "the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The people of Israel at that time would have loved to elevate Jesus as king and to chase the Romans out. But Jesus came not just to save them, but to save us all and he did it the way he knew it needed to be done. Not with power, but with

love. Not with power that was political, but with power that overcame death and the grave. A political victory was simply not enough. Jesus was going for a victory once for all time, for all of us.

The prophet Zechariah continued in his words by saying this, “return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare I will restore to you double.” It struck me this week, as I was looking at this text, as I was praying and thinking about what this triumphal entry meant, what it means to recognize Jesus as Savior and rescuer. And how we can live in that hope and that promise. How we can experience that forgiveness, cling to that forgiveness, even be transformed to be forgiving people through that forgiveness we receive. When I came across this notion, this phrase “prisoners of hope,” I thought to myself the hope that we have in hosanna, in Jesus. The hope that we have because of his sacrifice for us. The hope that we have with him reigning eternally at the right hand of the Father. That is a hope that is inescapable. It's a hope that binds us to him and to his future and to his love and mercy and righteousness. It's a hope that changes our lives. It's a hope that will change our world, as God is at work in it and in us and through us.

It's Palm Sunday and it's still COVID time. Easter is coming. Salvation is about to be won for us and yet we live in a world with disease and anger and cruelty, death and murder and we might even say hopelessness.

But we are the people that Jesus came to serve, to lead, to give life. We are the people who are prisoners of hope. It is the gift of God for us. It is a living active word. It is light in the midst of darkness. It is joy in the midst of struggle. It is love even in response to selfishness and hatred in our world. It's the living hope of Christ our king. We might falsely call out “Hosanna!” as the people of Israel did that day and quickly changed their tune later in the week, but we live with the hope of the cross and Easter. We have a hero. We have a God who knows our needs and hears our cries and gives us eternal living Hope. And so we live rejoicing, even in the midst of struggle. We live shouting with all God's people “Hosanna to our Hero, our Savior, our Messiah, our Lord” and, thanks be to God, we have the power to lift his name on high. We sing together.