

This Sunday's texts:

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Philippians 2:5-11

John 12:12-19

King Jesus
Pastor Joe Hill
April 2, 2023

The Gospel reading for today is from the Gospel of John, chapter 12, verses 12 through 19:

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." At first His disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about Him and that these things had to be done to Him. Now the crowd that was with Him when He called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that He had performed this sign, went out to meet Him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after Him!"

This is the Word of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, probe our hearts with Your Word this morning. Lord, rout out those hopes and expectations in us that are in line more with the values of the world than they are with the person and the truth of Jesus Christ, so that we may know Your love more perfectly, that we may experience Your grace and live in the purpose and power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning and greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Today marks the beginning of Holy Week in the Church year, where we remember the final week of Jesus's Life. As we begin this meaningful season on Palm Sunday, we remember and reflect on Jesus's final Journey, his entrance into Jerusalem, where He was welcomed like a king, but it was a trip that would ultimately lead Him to the cross and the empty tomb.

This Palm Sunday, I want you to consider this question. What are your expectations of Jesus?

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, He was welcomed like a king with praises on account of the things people had heard about Him, the miracles He had done, based on the hopes and expectations of the people. John 12:18 says, "Many people, because they had heard that He had performed the sign [which is raising Lazarus from the dead], went out to meet Him." But how quickly that tune would change? On Sunday, they came out to see a miracle worker with shouts of "Hosanna!" "Blessed is He who

comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the king of Israel!” But in just a few days, the same crowds would be chanting something very different. “Crucify Him! ... We have no king but Caesar”¹ What happened? Jesus turned out to not be what the people expected and they had chosen their king.

Now this idea of the king of the Jews, it's rooted deeply in an Old Testament covenant, a promise that God made to His people. It wouldn't just be that there would be a king over Israel, but rather that there would be a king who would sit on David's throne forever, that He would reign with justice and grace and love, and that He would lead God's people out of captivity and condemnation into freedom to be the autonomous people of God, living abundantly, according to the purpose God had set for them. However, at the time of Jesus, the Jews lived in anticipation of who this king would be. The promise had not yet been fulfilled because they were living under the harsh and oppressive rule of Rome. Caesar was a harsh king over them and they lived under his burden. For Caesar, so long as the Jewish people played nice, they didn't cause too much trouble, they were tolerated. But this stripped away the dignity of God's people. They were subject and subjugated to Rome.

Even still they clung in faith to God's promises. They knew that God would be faithful. They knew that there would be a King who would sit on the throne of David forever, a King who would lead them into freedom as the free people of God. And on Palm Sunday, the people believed that they had found their King. So they shouted, “Blessed is the king of Israel!” “Hosanna” which means save us.

Yet there was a problem, the problem of expectations. On Palm Sunday, Jesus was welcomed in like a king by a people who hoped that He would save them from Rome, that He would work miracles around them, among them, that He would give them what they wanted, that He'd give them what they hoped for. Now King Jesus certainly was riding in to save, but not like the king they expected, not with an entourage or fanfare, riding on a mighty horse with armed guards that strode triumphantly into the city to take over. He was humble. He rode on a donkey. He was surrounded by His group of unassuming disciples, a group of normal people and outcasts, not a typical king. And He wasn't going to assume a place on a typical throne. He was coming in to take charge, not by force or by violence, but by way of a cross, not to give them what they wanted, but to give them what they needed.

Here's why I think this matters for us today. It's easy for us to get used to the wrong set of expectations about Jesus. We develop a picture of Jesus in our minds that may or may not be in sync with what God's word says about Him. We formulate this picture in our heads. Jesus meets our expectations. He gives us what we want. He delivers for us the things that we hope for. Nothing is easier than worshiping a God made in our own image. Yet the reality is that Jesus is who He is regardless of what

¹ John 19:15

anybody believes about Him. If there were one Christian on this planet among billions who didn't believe, the truth about Jesus would not change. His reign is sovereign and true whether it's recognized or not. He's the King to those who cry "Hosanna!" and the King of those who scream "Crucify!"

At the end of the day, what is true about Jesus does not change based on what people believe about Him. One day every person will stand before the King and on that day, they will not be saved by a toothless idol, a god made in their own image, powerless, but by the real King of glory in all of His glory who truly can and does save.

Friends, it is so easy for us to form Christ the King in our own image. He's the God who loves the things we love, disapproves of the things we disapprove of. He never shines a light deep into the darkness of our lives. He doesn't look for the things we hope nobody sees. He commands us to love our enemies. He says to forgive seventy times seven times, bless those who curse you, and then He is more than happy to make all of the same exceptions to those commands that we want. Love your enemies, except that one person. Forgive as you have been forgiven, except obviously that one thing. We form Jesus in our own image and then we worship Him for that. But if we're being honest, when we do that, we are really only worshiping ourselves. It is easy to conform Jesus to our hopes, to our dreams, and expectations, rather than the other way around, to conform our hopes and our expectations to the truth about King Jesus and follow him on His triumphal entry to the cross, where our sins are hung and nailed and washed away, forgiven, washed clean in the blood of Christ, and where we have new life through Jesus' resurrection.

For those of us who believe, we have to wrestle with the reality that often our understanding of the Jesus of scripture and the values that we have as Americans or Westerners, people living in the Bay Area, conservatives or liberals all get mixed together and we can end up with a Jesus who cares about the things we do, loves the people we love, judges the people we do, and condones the way that we are already living our lives.

I want you to hear this today. If there's no friction between the way you're living your life today and the call that your King has on it, one of two things has happened. The first is that you are already perfect and if that's true, then you don't have to be here today. You are excused. But if it's not that, and I know for me it is certainly not that, then the most likely thing that has happened is that Jesus has conformed a little bit too much to our image. It was so easy for those folks 2,000 years ago to wave palm branches and shout "Hosanna!" to a King made in their own image and so it is with us today. But here's the thing. If that is true, then we are expecting too little from our King because a King, a savior, a Jesus that is made in our own image cannot save us from the things that we don't save ourselves from. He loves us just as we are, but He leaves us just as we are, dead in sin and without hope.

But the real King, the real Jesus is the One who brings the dead back to life. So my challenge for you today is this. Ask God to teach you about the King, to teach you about His character, about His son. Seek Him out in the scriptures and see what the scriptures tell you about your King. When your King says forgive your enemies², are you tempted to think “Yeah, I know, but not them?” When He says love your neighbor³, are you tempted to think “Yeah, but you don't know my neighbors.” When your Lord, when you're King says you can't serve both God and money⁴, what do you do with that? Or how about this? When your King says you are forgiven, do you believe Him? When He says you are loved, do you believe it? When he says that your life is inherently valuable, do you say “Yes, it is Lord”? When Jesus says I came to give you life and give it to you abundantly⁵, is there part of you that still wonders if a life of obedience to the teachings of Jesus is somehow less than a life living for yourself? When Jesus says “This is My body given for you” and “My blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,”⁶ do you reach out and take it in faith and know that your God has unreservedly given Himself to you, with no regrets He is yours and you are His? Do you believe it?

Thank God that we don't have a Savior who merely gives us what we want. He gives us what we need.

What I'm asking us to do today, on this Palm Sunday, is come face-to-face with the real King Jesus, the king of Israel. On that first Palm Sunday, as Jesus came into Jerusalem, we see the striking contrast between the people's expectations and the real Jesus, the One who rides in humbly on a donkey to be hung on a cross, who comes in humility to assume His rightful place on the throne, not just in some city halfway around the world, 2,000 years ago, but in our lives today. There is a king over all of creation, and all authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to Him. With that authority, He has swung wide-open the doors to the kingdom of heaven. He says come in and follow me. He is Jesus and He is the King. Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. The king of Israel.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You that Your wisdom is so high above our own, Lord, that Your thoughts are not our thoughts and Your ways are not our ways, that You love us enough to not give us what we want, but to give us what we need, to not indulge our desires, but to forgive our sins, to raise us from the dead, and to give us abundant and eternal life through your Son, the King who does not lord his authority over others, but lays it down in sacrifice. He is so worthy of our praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

² Matthew 6:14

³ Matthew 22:39

⁴ Matthew 6:24

⁵ John 10:10 (ESV)

⁶ Matthew 26:26-9