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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, March 24, 2018
Palm Sunday/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B

Primary Text: Mark 11:1-11

John 12:12-16

Sermon Title: “Everybody Loves a Parade”

Theme

Text

^{Mark 11:1}When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,
"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹¹Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

^{John 12:12}The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord —
the King of Israel!"

¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

¹⁵"Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!"

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

Sermon

After preaching on the Scriptural Stations of the Cross for five weeks, I decided I wanted to really celebrate Palm Sunday like I remember from my youth. Old timers like me will remember that there used to be a day on the liturgical calendar simply called Palm Sunday. But many years ago the church replaced it with Palm/Passion Sunday and that was because church goers tend not to come back for the Passion that begins on Holy Thursday and includes Good Friday and concludes at Easter Vigil on Saturday evening.

So today we are simply going to celebrate Palm Sunday for all that it means for us, in a sermon that I have entitled, “Everybody Loves a Parade.”

It’s true! Everybody loves a parade. Maybe one day soon I will be able to accompany Elliott, my grandson, at a parade.

The parade that was Palm Sunday did not feature bands or fire engines or Shriners in miniature cars. No, it was much simpler. Just Jesus on the colt of a donkey and hundreds of admirer’s.

Today you heard both Mark’s version as the processional gospel and John’s version as the gospel reading. They are very similar, but only John’s version actually calls out the use of palms.

It was the evangelist Luke who wrote in his gospel that sometime before, Jesus had “set his face toward Jerusalem.” That is actually an Old Testament phrase repurposed only once in the New Testament by Luke. I love the phrase because it expresses the determination that Jesus had.

Well the time has finally come. Both Mark and John have Jesus arriving from Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead.

There was a lot of excitement in the community of Jerusalem. The Passover was nearing and the town was beginning to bloom in population as Jewish pilgrims arrived from all over the known world to celebrate the somber festival of remembrance.

But it wasn't just the Passover. This year the word had gotten out that Jesus of Nazareth was going to attend. By this time, Jesus had been doing ministry for about three years. His preaching and teaching was a breath of fresh air, and not at all what the common Jew heard from their rabbis or the priests. Jesus told them that God loved them and their sacrifices were misguided. Jesus himself told them that they were forgiven for their sins.

Of course, this got him in big trouble with the priests and the scribes and the other Jewish leaders, because that was not what they were teaching and the whole Temple sacrificial system was based on an angry God, angry with their sinfulness that needed to be appeased with sacrifices.

And during that same three year ministry, Jesus performed signs and miracles – he had power like they had never seen before, and yet he always said his power came from God – whom he called his heavenly Father, and told others that they could call God their Father too!

So you see, for the average lay peasant Jew, Jesus was a breath of fresh air. His message and miracles were welcome among them. And while he was a celebrity in Galilee, as I said, there were Jews gathered from all over the known world who had only heard of Jesus. And now the city of Jerusalem was a buzz that he was going to come to Jerusalem while they were all there for the Passover.

“Could he be the one? Could he be the Messiah of God?” They asked one another. Of course, their idea of the Messiah of God was someone like King David who would be a military political hero; one who would lead them to run the Romans out of power.

Apparently Jesus was aware of all this drama. Ironic then, don't you think, that Jesus chose a young donkey to make his grand entrance! A donkey? A little donkey at that? Donkeys were beasts of burden, not the preferred ride of anyone, let alone a king.

Filled with anticipation, the people came out of the shops and restaurants to see Jesus. They all looked down the street to watch for him and then, when he finally arrived he was on the colt of a donkey.

Not very messianic!

Have you ever found yourself in an underwhelming situation and decided it's going to have to be up to you to make a big deal out of something that was obviously not the big deal you had anticipated? The people wanted Jesus to be Messiah and they were not going to be denied their Messiah, so they tore palm branches off the trees and threw them on his path. Others took off their cloaks and put them on his path. To the best of their ability, they were making a royal highway for him. Oh this is going to be great!

It was the Sunday before the beginning of the Passover. Everybody loves a parade. Jesus was coming into town, and they were going to have one.

We know how things turn out.

We know that in the next few days Jesus would become increasingly provocative.

Jesus knows how things must turn out too.

The salvation of all humankind is at stake.

And while we could get all somber – the day, Palm/Passion Sunday calls for the reading of the Passion - but we aren't going there – not yet – not today.

Today it's enough to know

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Everyone knows that verse, but the one that follows is equally important.

¹⁷Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

This is all good news for us.