**Mark 11:1-10** March 25, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Palm Sunday (Lent 6)

*Mark 11:1As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’ ” 4They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” 6They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last week in the sermon I mentioned about storylines. Remember that? Now, some of you were not here last week and so you don’t know what I am talking about. Others of you were here last week and you still can’t remember it, and maybe you even feel a little bad that you were here in this church last week but can’t remember a word of the pastor’s sermon. You’re good. It brings up a topic worth considering before we get to this week’s Word of God.

A few generations ago, there was a man who complained, “I have heard thousands of sermons in my life, and I can’t remember a single one. I have been wasting my time!” After quite a conversation, someone observed, “I have been married 30 years and my wife has cooked about 30,000 meals for me. Yet I cannot remember the entire menu of a single meal. But if she had not given me those meals, I would be dead today.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Worth thinking about.

So, what was it I mentioned about story telling? You need a beginning, a middle, and an end—in that order. Last week I mentioned that because in last week’s reading actually happened *after* this week’s sermon text.

**So This Is What Our King Looks Like!**

The beginning, middle and end concept of storytelling is important for this week’s message too. Palm Sunday, like so much of the Bible, is a story that has dulled because you know how it ends. You know how this is going to play out from Palm Sunday to Good Friday to Easter Sunday. You know the end. You have no question, “What next?” You don’t wonder who this Jesus is. You aren’t surprised that after three years of humility, he accepts honors due to a king.

But here is something I suggest you try: Some time, spend about two hours and read the Gospel of Mark beginning to end, or you can listen to it in audio book format in about the same time. While reading (or listening), imagine that you are hearing it for the first time. You are a child sitting on grandpa’s lap, reading a story not knowing how it will turn out. If you read Mark in this way, you will discover something pretty cool: Palm Sunday is the moment you are waiting for. For the first ten chapters you hear the story of Jesus: how he heals people, how he teaches people, how some people come to a conviction of who Jesus is, while others are convinced that he is evil incarnate. Two-thirds of the way through the book, Palm Sunday is the moment you are waiting for. This man who has power, wisdom and authority is finally recognized for who he is by the masses. He does not assume power through brutality or violence or scheming. People by the thousands honor him on Palm Sunday because they realize, at least partially, who he is.

But there is one troubling detail in Palm Sunday—the donkey. Why a donkey? Shouldn’t a real king have a horse, or a chariot? It was a point that stuck out like a sore thumb. In fact, in the time of the early church, the old Romans often mocked Christians because of just this point. One of the nicknames the pagan Romans had for Christians was related to an impolite term for a donkey. The proud, war-like Romans thought it pretty hilarious that these Christians claimed a king, even worshiped a Savior, who rode… a donkey. “A king on a donkey!” the scoffers said. “You can’t make this stuff up!”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Yet, like all the details in a mystery novel have a point, the puzzle of a king on a donkey has great significance for those who have ears to hear.

Often, Jesus had headed off people’s attempts to honor him. One time they tried to make him king. Jesus dismissed them. Another time a man came to him and addressed Jesus as “Good teacher.” Jesus replied coolly, “Why do you call me good. No one is good except God.” (Mk 10:17-18) Palm Sunday was different. The hour had come for the Son to be glorified, so Jesus let people honor him. He would let them speak their hosannas. But Jesus would let them do it on his terms, not theirs. And so he sent disciples into the near-by town to get… a donkey.

If you were a devout Jew, and you saw Jesus riding into town on a donkey, maybe you would cast your mind back to a prophecy from the prophet Zechariah, the same prophecy we heard in the first reading: *“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey.”*

The donkey is more than an identifier, it is a status symbol. A black limousine isn’t just a car, it communicates power, wealth, importance. A donkey communicates, well… It communicates humility, gentleness, approachableness. Jesus is exactly who he claims to be, the king of the world. But he would have none afraid to approach him. Jesus invites people who feel the lowliness of their life, who acknowledge the lies they have lived, who could kick themselves for the selfishness they have shown, even the crimes they have committed. He wants none who comes in humble repentance to be afraid to approach him.

This donkey communicates some other truths a little more subtly. The donkey makes you aware that what happens five days later, on Good Friday was not an unforeseen event. If Jesus had galloped into Jerusalem on a stallion, Good Friday would have proved him a failure. But here he arrives in Jerusalem on a sure-footed, low-to-the-ground steed. And looking back to Palm Sunday from Good Friday we can agree, “Yes, all is as it should have been!”

And here is one more thing about Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the Sunday before Passover. Think about Passover. Passover celebrated God’s deliverance for his people. According to Exodus 12, on Passover Friday, every Jewish home was to slaughter a Passover Lamb in remembrance of God’s deliverance on the first Passover. Exodus 12 said that on the Sunday before Passover Friday the Israelites were to select and set aside their sacrificial Passover lambs. On this day of selecting the sacrificial Passover lamb, Jesus rides into Jerusalem. Can you hear the echo of John the Baptist whispering behind the cheering crowds, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”? Yes, call him a king. And call him Lamb of God, *“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne…from that time on and forever.”* (Is 9:6-7).

Jesus riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is not a clip art cartoon. It is a masterpiece of art, and as we look carefully into the painting, we find more and more details. Each one tells us,

**I. Jesus Is a King!** 🡹

Which sounds great! If Jesus is so kind, humble, forgiving, yet powerful, then we rejoice to call him King. But here’s the other part…

**II. If Jesus Is a King, Then What Are We?** 🡻

We are subjects of a king. I thought we gave up on that 242 years ago! We have a deep-seated suspicion about kings. What’s the saying? “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” That has been the problem with kings and queens over the centuries. They tend to use their power for their own enrichment and pleasure.

This means that the concept of Jesus as a king, as they acclaimed him on Palm Sunday, is something counter-cultural. King Jesus is one thing. Us as a king’s subjects is another. Subjects have to serve.

That is what happened. When Jesus told his disciples to go get a donkey, they didn’t ask a question. They followed his instructions to a “t”. When they got back to Jesus with the colt, they immediately saw that it would not be right for Jesus to be seated bareback on a dusty, hairy donkey, so they placed their cloaks on the donkey. (What’s a cloak? In the ancient world a cloak was a longer robe which pretty much served the purpose of a long jacket. Under the cloak, they wore short-sleeved or sleeveless, knee-length tunics, more or less underwear.) Not to be outdone, others put their cloaks down on the path to “pave” the way for this king. Others went out and cut branches and palm fronds and then ***“Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!’”*** (9-10).

And Jesus accepted it all. It was all pleasing to him. Whether it was placing valuable cloaks in the dirt for a donkey to trample, or using their voices to acclaim Jesus as God’s Messiah, or for lack of anything else, to simply cut palm fronds for the way, they serve him. Jesus accepted it all. They gave Jesus what was rightly his. Yes, all that we have is rightly his.

Except, like taxes to the government, how often don’t people seek as many exemptions and deductions from giving to Jesus as they can imagine.

You see it in the world around us. People by the millions talk about God. But the moment God tells them to subject their wills to what he says, they create a cardboard cut-out figure of God who is exactly what *they* think God should look like. Their god is a god of their own making.

It creeps into our lives too. “Days off are my days, not God’s days. My money is mine, and it is rather inconsiderate of God to require that I give a significant percentage of my income to him, when I have less than most of my neighbors. Why should I watch my language, when no one else does. Why should God insist that I act in such a way that I get labelled as strange, intolerant, stand-offish, prudish, or grouchy. Does God really have a right to ask that of me?” Well, frankly, yes he does.

But if that is how we look at the whole thing, we have a problem. We are completely forgetting what God has given us. Christ Jesus went to the cross in Jerusalem and bought us with his own blood. He freed us from the condemnation of our sins. He has given us life eternal. And so we can bend the knee to Jesus, not grudgingly, but out of reverent joy for our liege. When he speaks, we are glad to listen and even change our minds to agree with his wisdom. When he confronts us with our selfish and ungodly behaviors, we repent, ever thankful for his patience with us. We part with some of our hard earned money in support of his kingdom because we want others to experience it. Jesus has a right to it all because his kingdom is what matters. In fact, it is all actually his anyway! As one of our hymns succinctly states, “We give thee but thine own, Whate’er the gift may be; All that we have is thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from thee.”

Long ago we gave up on monarchies. We have moved on to representative government and relegated monarchies to the dust bin of history. Doesn’t matter: Jesus is still our king; we are his subjects. But his kingdom is unlike any earthly kingdom. He rules for the good of his people. There is no corruption, no abuse of power. There is no swamp to be drained in his kingdom. Only a good, kind, wise, powerful, forgiving king. Hosanna! Amen.

1. http://msgboard.snopes.com/message/ultimatebb.php?/ubb/get\_topic/f/82/t/000029.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Christians were sometimes called *assinari* (ass drovers) by the Romans. *The Wenzel Commentary*, 570. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)