

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Luke 19:29-38

*<sup>29</sup> When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup> saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” <sup>32</sup> So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup> They said, “The Lord needs it.” <sup>35</sup> Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup> saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”*

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his steadfast love endures forever!*

*Let Israel say,*

*“His steadfast love endures forever.”*

*Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the Lord.*

*This is the gate of the Lord;  
the righteous shall enter through it.*

*I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.*

*The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the chief cornerstone.*

*This is the Lord’s doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.*

*This is the day that the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

*Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!*

*O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!*

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.*

*We bless you from the house of the Lord.*

*The Lord is God,  
and he has given us light.*

*Bind the festal procession with branches,  
up to the horns of the altar.*

*You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;  
you are my God; I will extol you.*

*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

Isn't this great!! Reading the story of Jesus' entry into the city of Jerusalem makes us feel good! Everybody, appeared to be on board! Jesus is King! The whole city of Jerusalem seemed to be in party mode. "Hosanna! Jesus, save us! Messiah—save us!" the crowds shouted. Wow! Isn't it great!

It was reminiscent of the beautiful words written by the Psalmist in Psalm 118. In fact, there seems to be quotes from that psalm. Maybe the people were actually reconnecting with those words because of their hope in what they wanted Jesus to do for them. The psalm praises and glorifies God.

The sentiment expressed gratitude for all that God had done for them; yet recognizing that they would always need God. God was their ruler—their King; and nothing could replace God. One gets the feeling that the intention of the one singing the psalm was that he or she would never have any other God.

I want to share this short story with you to set the stage for today's reflection on the Palm Sunday story. A woman was driving home one night. The weather was really nasty. Rain was coming down in buckets and visibility was very poor. Seeing taillights ahead of her, she followed the car in front. Not being able to see, the car in front seemed to be going in the right direction. So, she stuck with it.

All of a sudden, the car in front of her came to a stop. She began to wonder what had happened; perhaps the car in front had hit a deer or something like that. She began to feel uncomfortable; thinking being stopped in the middle of the road can often lead to accidents.

Much to her alarm the car in front of her turned off the lights. Her concern was now growing as well as her anger, and she was then startled by a knocking on her window. She looked up and there was a man standing in the pouring rain wanting to speak to her. She cracked the window open and asked the man what the problem was. The man replied by stating that that was the question he was going to ask her. She retorted that she wasn't the one who had stopped in the middle of the road and then turned off the car lights.

The man's reply was that they were not in the middle of the road, but in his driveway. Obviously, this woman had chosen the wrong leader to follow. She had chosen a leader who would not take her to where she wanted and needed to go. She had chosen the wrong leader and the wrong road.

The Palm Sunday story is recorded in all four Gospels—each with their own little variations. Palm Sunday was a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9 written nearly 550 years earlier.

*"Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

In the story, we are told that the children of God had gathered for the Passover in the holy city of Jerusalem. Prior to Jesus' entry into the city we know Jesus had done a lot of teaching and performed numerous amazing miracles, including the raising of Lazarus from the dead just prior to entering Jerusalem. The Jews came to the streets to see Jesus and to welcome and honor him as their King—their Holy Messiah. Some of them probably actually witnessed Jesus perform miracles and teach in the temple; others surely heard the amazing stories.

They shouted, "Hosanna!" which means, save us! "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna!" It was foretold to them that a Messiah would one day come to set them free. They believed their mighty king, the promised messiah, would come as a mighty warrior and free them from oppression. In those moments, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, they

were convinced that Jesus was the one they'd been awaiting. We know, however, that things changing over the course of that week.

The disciples, like everyone else lining the streets, got caught up in the excitement. Unfortunately, most, if not all, of the disciples had the same ideas of what the promised messiah would do when he came. They believed Jesus was the promised one, and this grand entrance the people showered on Jesus surely was a sign of the turning point, the rise of Jesus' power, claiming his throne and saving God's chosen people.

They were correct about the events signaling a turning point. They were right about Jesus' rise to power. But like the rest of the crowd, they did not fully understand the true mission Jesus came to fulfill. They did not understand that he came to set their spirits free from sin and to open the door to God's holy presence. Imagine the disciples' disappointment and shock at the end of the week when the crowds turned against Jesus, tried him, and nailed him to a cross. Remember, most of them ran and hid when that time came because they were afraid. Peter even denied any association with Jesus.

Indeed, Jesus is a king, but Jesus did not let all of the grandiose admiration go to his head. Thank goodness Jesus could not be swayed by cries of the crowd to become who they wanted him to be. He knew God's plan which, as God's Son, he came to fulfill.

Jesus was making a statement about himself when he rode into town on a donkey. Jesus knew exactly who he was. He knew he was the Messiah, the one foretold of by the prophets Isaiah and Zechariah. He was a king who ruled with humility, meekness and peace. Not only did our King Jesus know precisely who he was then and what his mission was when he entered Jerusalem, he knows who he is and what his mission is now as he enters the Jerusalem of each of our lives. Embodied in his presence, that day and today, is a transparent honesty which defies so much of worldly leadership today.

Our King comes with compassion for souls and bodies. During Jesus' ministry on earth, he healed lepers, made the blind to see and the lame to walk. He met and talked with people no one else would talk to because they were different or unclean. He helped wrong doers to see God and change their lives.

Jesus cared for people so much that he cried for the people of Jerusalem saying, "*O Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing*" (Matthew 23:37) I can't imagine how many tears he must be crying now as he looks down on the world lost in sin today.

Unlike the models before us of leaders and kings who focus more on themselves and what people think of them to determine their decisions on how to rule over others, Jesus wants nothing more than to enter our lives and make us whole. He wants to walk with us. He wants to help us connect our spiritual selves with the living of our days. He wants to heal us where there is brokenness in our lives. He wants to cleanse us and free us from our sin and transform us into willing disciples.

Here then is the questions before each of us as we reflect on this joyous day—Palm Sunday. Is Jesus your king? Or are you serving another king? Who or what is king and ruling your heart?

There is a man named Bob. "Bob has gone to church all of his life. He thinks of himself as being a very religious man. Bob is in his mid-sixties. He has lived a full life. He hasn't let religion spoil his fun. In fact, although Bob is religious, he has no king. He has no lord. Well, that's not quite true. He does. All of us worship something. There is only one problem. Bob's

king's name is Bob. He goes through the forms of religious practice. He wouldn't miss church on Palm Sunday. In fact, right now he is sitting through the last five minutes of some preacher's sermon somewhere.

Bob's problem is that Bob has committed himself to himself instead of Jesus Christ. Bob is his own lord. He gets turned off by emotional preaching that talks about hell. He wants soothing talk about heaven. He hates preaching with quotes from the Bible. He wants to hear soothing, comforting talk about psychology. He wants no mention of sin from the pulpit. According to him, "That went out of style with the middle ages." Bob gets turned off when he sees Jesus the Messiah, the humble King coming his way.

Then there is Hal. Hal is a cynic. He has every reason not to believe. His life was loaded with doubts. "How in the world could God become a man? How could an intelligent person trust the Bible?"

Yes, there is a difference between Bob and Hal. Whereas Bob ran the other direction every time Jesus began to come his way, Hal stopped. Hal took a good look, a long look, into the eyes of the prophesied King. He let those eyes probe his religious self-importance. He let that penetrating glance cut through the smoke screen of his doubt. He was willing to doubt his doubts. He was willing to go back to the drawing board and read some of the great writers of the Christian faith. A scientist by profession, Hal was willing to objectively examine the claims of Christ intellectually, and to experiment with them in his own life and experience Christ presence first-hand. He took Jesus at His Word, only to discover this One Holy Man to be his Lord and Savior. Are you like Bob? Or are you like Hal?

Our King is coming! Our King rides towards us and looks into our eyes. We shout Hosanna. Save us as he approaches. Are we serious about this? Do we really want King Jesus to rule in our lives? Do we want our king our way, or do we want our King God's way? Some will hear these questions and squirm in their seats. Others will hear these questions and confess their ongoing need for Jesus' rule in their heart. They will recognize that being faithful is an ongoing challenge and will welcome their King's help to remain faithful and true. Their shouts of "Hosanna!" are joyous because they know they are loved by God who sent His Son to be their Savior, friend, ally, comforter, and guide. They know King Jesus. Where are you in the crowd?

Isn't today great! It's awesome! Everyone seems to be on board! But the tides going change throughout the week. Jesus is going to disappoint the people. He's going to overturn the money changers' tables and release the animals at the temple. He's not going to be the king they wanted him to be. He's much, much better than that. Amen.