

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Mark 11:1-10

*When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and 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. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,*

*“Hosanna!*

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

*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!*

*Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Main Event—the daily battle that goes on inside of you. Standing in this corner, weighing in at the heavy weight of lean and mean, using the weapons of temptation, deception, and manipulation to stir-up pride, greed, hatred, and distrust in God to further strengthen the hold he has on people, creating havoc in far too many lives, giving him increased power, the king of evil, sin and death, the ruler over hell, the one, the only, Satan.

And standing in the opposing corner, weighing in at the powerful weight of glorious eternity, glowing with the everlasting light of love, a teacher, a healer, a compassionate friend, accepting and loving all people, the suffering servant who came to set people free from the misery of hopelessness, sin and death, replacing these with truth, peace, faith, salvation, joy and hope, it’s the one—the only—the way, the truth, and the life, the Son of God, Prince of Peace, Immanuel, Savior, Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

Every day you wake up to this battle, and every day you must decide who you will allow to live-in and rule your heart. Some days, temptations arise, troubles abound, desires grow strong, and we can be lured into periods of questioning our faith and the meaning of our lives, perhaps even persuading us to choose a new path to travel—one that avoids God. I don’t have to tell you what happens when people choose to turn from God. All we need to do is to look around us and we can see the results of what happens when people give into temptation—evil wins, evil wins.

Now Jesus is the ultimate example of a life lived without giving into temptation. He put all of his trust and faith in God. Some people might say, “Yeah, but look what that got him—people didn’t like him; he suffered horribly and died a painful death on a shameful cross. I’m not sure I want to follow his example if that’s where it is going to take me.” That, my friends, is exactly what Satan wants us to think.

On that day long ago, when Jesus rode on the back of a colt into the city of Jerusalem, he knew exactly what he was getting into; he knew that the time had come for him to die. Don’t you wonder if he was tempted to turn and run away from Jerusalem? The bible doesn’t say that

happened although we do know that later in the week, Jesus asked that God might please change his mind; but then ultimately, Jesus surrendered to God's will.

Jesus boldly rode into Jerusalem on a colt, a symbol of royalty, openly challenging those who feared his power. It was one last attempt to help the people realize that he was the true promised Messiah. That is exactly what the Jewish people wanted—a king, someone to free them from all their oppressors. So when they saw him, they saw a mighty warrior, a conqueror, and they cheered, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" meaning "Save us. Save us." They wanted Jesus to be their Messiah, but they wanted him to fit their mold of what it meant to be a Messiah.

Things really haven't changed a lot since that day. People still come to Jesus filled with excitement and hope, shouting Hosanna, save us, but save us on our terms.

That's not what Jesus came to do. Jesus was a mighty warrior, a king, and a conqueror. He did come to set all people free. In fact, Jesus came to save us all, but he didn't come to do it exactly the way the people that day in Jerusalem thought he should, nor did he come to save us on our terms.

Jesus saves us every day as we fight the personal inner battles we face. He knows that the root of our troubles and unhappiness goes deeper than what happens around and to us. He understands we experience pain and anguish when we are treated unfairly. He can relate to the frustration we feel when everything seems to be going wrong around us and we feel our lives are out of our control. Jesus gets it!

Jesus, being a Jew living under the same oppression as those yelling, hosanna, that day understood their desire for freedom, but he also knew that simply eliminating the cause of their oppression would only satisfy them for a little while. There would always be something else to stir them up and lead to their cries for someone to save them. A spiritual cleansing, a soulful transformation was required to really save the people from a cyclical pattern of oppression and freedom.

Jesus did not come to ensure that we will never experience all the things that disturb us, that make us uncomfortable, that makes living hard. Jesus saves us from within ourselves, filling us with Godly values, guiding us to make decisions that will relieve us from burdens that seek to cling to us and make us feel miserable and angry. To free us from even ourselves, the sin that results when we try to save ourselves at all costs.

For example, many times when people experience brokenness in relationships that they thought were deep and trustworthy. They may feel hurt, even grief. When left to fester within, that feeling of loss can turn into anger, the kind of anger that strikes out at the one initiating the pain, which only makes the whole situation worse. We get caught up in our emotions and participate in sinful behavior as a result.

Too often we don't stop to see the options we have before us before reacting. So, instead of seeking healing through communication, forgiveness and understanding, which are the ways of Jesus, we look to Jesus for justification for our anger, or maybe help in getting our revenge. Come on, that's not Jesus, now is it? Would that really make everything better?

Some years ago, a garbage truck in Virginia exploded. The crew had unknowingly picked up some calcium hypochlorite, a powder form of chlorine which dissolves harmlessly when put in a swimming pool, but under pressure explodes. When the crew compacted the trash, the truck blew up. Two firemen ended up in the hospital, and poisonous gases forced office buildings to be evacuated.

Sometimes we can be just like that garbage truck. We pick up a lot of nasty "chemicals" out there in the week: stress, trials, anger, frustration, temptations. If we try to process it all on

our own, we can have a blow up! Jesus can save us from such explosions. He meets us, calms us, helps to lift our burden, and fills us with his Spirit, serving as a release valve, saving us from spiritual and moral explosions.

Jesus did not come to treat the symptoms of our challenges and pain. Jesus came to get to the root of things, to help us win the spiritual battle. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day long ago, that's the message he wanted to convey to the people. It's the message Jesus wants us to understand too. Because of all the pain and suffering in the nation and world today. It's not a popular message, just like it wasn't popular then, making it really tempting to abandon God and giving in to the simple and quick satisfaction worldly temptation seemingly supplies. Sadly, that satisfaction is not lasting.

Then of course, if we choose to put our trust in God, we step out of the crowd that stands on the sidelines and shouts Hosannas, and into the street with Jesus. If we choose to put our trust in God, we stop contributing to the problems and the darkness of the world and we become a source of hope and healing. We become an agent of God's love. It's a tough battle, a tough decision we make every day. Will we live in the light of God or the darkness of sin? Will we join Jesus in the streets of life?

Listen to this Palm Sunday Reflection written by James Thomlson. He wrote: "I like going to parades! While I have been in a few, I most enjoy standing on the sideline and watching the parade go by so that I can view all the participants.

Several years ago, when I was in Washington, DC, and attending the Washington City Church of the Brethren, there was a special Palm Sunday worship service planned for the entire community. There in the near downtown area of the city, Christians from several congregations banded together to reenact Jesus' entry into the city on Palm Sunday.

Instead of a donkey and palm branches, we had balloons, clowns, and a calliope. On that day, I was set to view another parade. About the time I became comfortable on the sidelines, someone came from within the parade and grasped my hand! All of a sudden, I was no longer viewing the parade – I was in the parade! Immediately, I was uncomfortable and wanted to shrink back into the crowd.

Then I remembered the first Palm Sunday. Do you suppose that had I been standing on the street watching 'that parade' and someone would have come to me and pulled me in I would have had a similar reaction? You see, standing along the street did not require me to commit myself to doing anything more than being seen. However, walking in the parade meant that I was now being identified as 'one of them.' On that particular day, did I want to be known as a follower of the Christ?

I still like to go to parades! When it comes to Palm Sunday with our Christ, I am ready to be pulled into the middle of the street. Are You?"

Are we willing to join with Jesus whom God sent to us to save us as **God intended**, knowing full well what we really need to prevail over our burdens and pain? Or will we watch him pass by, take a wait-and-see attitude, to see if Jesus does what we want and fits our mold for a Savior?

The battle is on, evil in one corner, pulling us one direction with temptation, using our dark emotions; and there's Jesus, out of the corner, leading the way in the parade of spiritual freedom. May our shouts of "Hosanna, God save us!" pull us into the streets with him. Amen.