

March 24, 2024 - "Look Who's Coming!"

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

"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!"*

The parade route begins near the twin towns of Bethpage and Bethany, less than two miles from Jerusalem and winds into the Holy City. The Grand Marshal is an unlikely hero – a rustic from a blue-collar town up north, the son of a woodworker. In keeping with his "common man" image, he decides to ride on a cut-rate float – the back of a donkey.

The crowd that chokes the road on that long-ago Sunday is made up of ordinary folk: merchants and mothers, goldsmiths and goatherders, clergymen and children. All of them are straining their necks to catch a glimpse of the man who would be Messiah. A copper-skinned fellow with a bushy beard calls out: "Anyone see him?"

"Not yet," cries a taller man, and then adds, "Do you think Jesus is the One? Do you think he will finally liberate us?"

"Who knows?" the swarthy man replies. "He can't be any worse than the other pretenders we've put up with."

The crowd erupts. He is coming! Like a surging sea, the people press forward as one. Children are hoisted on shoulders. Shouts of "Hosanna!" – "Save us now!" – tumble from excited lips. Some of the spectators leap onto the dusty road, spreading out cloaks and freshly cut palm branches to welcome the King of the Jews. Jesus rides by with a smile, touching outstretched hands and occasionally leaning forward to bless a child.

The parade ends at the steps of the great temple of Herod. Jesus dismounts and takes a stroll as his disciples fend off zealous sightseers. Finally, Jesus announces he will return to Bethany for the night and return the next day. It sounds like a wonderful beginning to what turned out to be a horrible week.

Look who's coming! It's Jesus! Palm Sunday, I think, as we remember what happened that day, asks us to think about where we would have been in the crowd that day. If this happened in downtown Hagerstown today, would we even bother to go? I don't imagine everyone in Jerusalem going to the grand parade that day.

But, I think, the deeper point of remembering this event and finding meaning in it for us today is that it challenges us to consider what are our beliefs and expectations of Jesus. The people gathered along the streets of Jerusalem certainly had their expectations of who Jesus was and based on that, what Jesus would do.

March 24, 2024 - "Look Who's Coming!"

Jesus boldly rode into Jerusalem on a colt (according to Mark), a symbol of royalty, openly challenging those who feared his power. It was one last attempt to help the people recognize that he was the true promised Messiah. That is exactly what the Jewish people wanted, the Messiah which the prophets foretold to them, someone to free them from all their oppressors. When they saw all the wonders he did and heard his teachings, they hoped he was the promised one. Their vision however of the Messiah was that he would be a mighty warrior, a conqueror, so when he rode into Jerusalem, 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. Give us what we want! Take away our suffering, make our lives easier. Make those who are our enemies, to be your puppets.

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 us and what directly affects 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. Jesus came and died to free us from even ourselves, to free us from the sin that results when we try to save ourselves at all cost or when we are too vulnerable or afraid to trust Jesus' help.

A general of the Persian army always gave his condemned prisoners a choice, the firing squad or the black door. Most chose the firing squad. The prisoners were never told what was on the other side of the door. Few ever chose the unknown of the black door. When asked what was on the other side of the black door, the general answered, "Freedom, and I've known a few men brave enough to take it."

Jesus came to save us, to free us. If the Jesus we are looking for is one who will justify an unhealthy or vengeful reaction that we choose for our challenges, we won't see the option of lasting freedom he offers us.

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. With Jesus we can face and overcome our challenges with wisdom and courage, forgiveness and love. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, 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. It can be difficult to break away from the pressures of the world's solutions to dealing with life's trials. If the Jesus we seek doesn't turn out to be someone other than we expected, it can be tempting to abandon him. Remember, that's what the people did to Jesus a few days after he rode into Jerusalem.

March 24, 2024 - "Look Who's Coming!"

A few years ago, Pastor Dusan Tillinger, was walking down Prague's Wenceslaus Square when coincidentally, without realizing it, found himself in the middle of a protest. "It was so easy to blend with them, to get into their middle and march with them," he said, "but once I tried to leave that mob, step out and continue on my way I couldn't. Bodies around me prevented me from getting out of the way despite all of my efforts. After I finally extricated myself from the crowd of protestors, I realized how powerful and influential even a small group can be, how easy it is to follow the masses without thinking about where it would lead me."

Hopefully, you can see that if we choose to put our trust in God, we step out of the crowd that stands on the sidelines shouting Hosannas, and we move into the street with Jesus. And in joining Jesus we, find not only the help we each need; but we also stop contributing to the problems and the darkness of the world. Because of the freedom we find through our relationship with him, we become a source of hope and healing for others, we become agents of hope and God's love.

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?

Do you have a GPS system in your car? Most cars come with them these days. If not, have ever used one on your phone?

Even with a GPS you can still make a wrong turn, can't you? One author humorously wrote: "At one point on a recent journey, I was quite sure the lady in the guidance system was wrong. She said to go left, and I didn't go left. I went right because I knew she was wrong.

Then the lady with the irritating voice said, "Recalculating route. When safe to do so execute a U-turn, turn around if possible."

I knew she was still wrong, so, know what I did? I turned her off. That's the beauty of that little box – you can turn her off – but then, would you believe it, I got completely lost and ended up driving round and round in circles! So, I turned the lady back on again, and you know what she said?

"I told you so you little idiot. You think I'm going to help you now? No way, Jose! Find your own way there yourself."

No, she didn't really say that. She said, "Recalculating route, Turn around if possible."

Jesus is always there for us, ready to help us and set us on the right track. We connect with him, and reconnect with him when needed when we turn off our own selfish ideas of who he should be and what he should do for us; when we turn off noise from the pressures of the misguided crowd around us; and turn his voice on so he can guide us, save us, free us, from those things that are upsetting, painful, oppressive things that dominate and weigh down our minds and spirits, making life miserable; and instead join him in the eternal life of God's kingdom.

Let us pray: Blessed is the king who comes in the name of Lord!

Gracious God, as we stand at the gates of the city, give us grace to recognize the king we proclaim, and courage to be a part of your kingdom even when it goes against our ways and the ways of the world, even when it leads us where we do not want to go.

Empower us to free ourselves from the tempting alternatives of power and wealth and status and embolden us to live lives of thanksgiving and praise. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven! Amen.