

**+ Mark 11:1-10 + Hosanna in the Highest! + 6th Sunday in Lent: Palm Sunday + 5 April 2009 +**

It's an unusual day today. It's not really any more different than any other Sunday, but it's still an unusual day, because it was an unusual day 2000 years ago in Jerusalem. Today you find palms on the altar and on your bulletin—symbols of triumph and life. The deep purple of royalty is on all the furniture up here, on myself and on the cross. The hymns are festive and filled with praise, yet one word sticks out—Hosanna!—"Save us, please!"

"Save us, please"? You'd expect to hear such words from the crying lips of one in danger or near death, but we hear in the Gospel Lesson "**Hosanna! ... Hosanna in the highest!**" We hear it not from the lips of people crying out in danger, but from throngs of children and men and women shouting at the top of their lungs, singing in praise of a king, who himself is unusual.

This king, who enters Jerusalem amidst hosannas of praise, is what makes today unusual. Though he enters Jerusalem triumphantly, he rides in on the back of a lowly donkey. Though acclaimed as king, he rides into Jerusalem not to take a throne, but to make a long, awful journey to a criminal's cross. None in that crowd will understand and most today don't either. Still we sing, **HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!** Blessed is he and blessed are we!

Jesus was almost there. His final trip to Jerusalem for his final Passover was almost complete, especially after nearly 17 miles of steep roads ascending 3500 ft. to Jerusalem from the city of Jericho in the valley below. The Mount of Olives towered before him as he approached the villages of Bethphage and Bethany. On the other side lay Jerusalem—the home of God's temple and the place where he was going to die.

Christ knew the end of his journey was near. The time had come to enter the Holy City and finish what he had come to do—defeat mankind's greatest enemies by his own death. To make that entrance, however, Jesus sent two of his disciples to carry out a special task in the village up ahead. Read his command closely and you'll see how amazing it really is. **"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. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"**

After 17 miles of very steep, dusty roads and a long journey from Galilee before that, it might seem like Jesus simply wanted a ride for the rest of the way, but in reality, he was displaying his control over all things. Recall the words of Zechariah, **"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."** Even Jesus' entrance would be unusual. You see, a donkey is no mighty steed. A humble beast of burden, yes, but no war horse. Still that donkey would be the King's ride of choice as Zechariah described him. That donkey would be a symbol of peace and gentleness, not a war horse fearless and ready to charge into the fray.

The Savior's divine control is even more evident when you realize he was going to ride an unbroken foal, a colt never ridden. As true God, he would ride that young donkey through shouting, singing, joy-filled crowds with no problem at all! Surely even the beast realized whom he was bearing. **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"**

At the same time, Jesus knew exactly where the disciples would find the colt tied up, knew what question the disciples would have to answer, and even knew what answer would satisfy the questioner. On top of that, Jesus told his disciples to answer, **"The Lord needs it..."** You may not realize this, but this is the first time in Mark's Gospel that Jesus describes himself with that royal title of **"Lord"**. The **Lord** was requisitioning this colt for his special use and would return him promptly. Not surprisingly the disciples found everything as Jesus had said. **"They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, 'What are you doing, untying that colt?' They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go."**

**Blessed is he!** Not only was Jesus in control of all things, but what's even more amazing is that he willingly went through with it. You see, Jesus knew what lay ahead for him in Jerusalem. He knew he would be acclaimed and praised as king, but he also knew in just a couple days those same crowds would turn on him in anger and hatred. He wouldn't be the king they expected, but more like the Passover lamb they were about to slaughter on Friday night. Jesus appeared to be going to war unprepared. No army stood behind him. He rode in alone. No fearless war horse marched beneath him, just a frightened colt with no previous experience. His only weapon was **"the name of the Lord"**, but still he would conquer.

Jesus knew exactly what he was about to endure. He knew the end of his journey would bring such excruciating pain and agony we shudder to think of it. His disciples would turn on him. His Father would forsake him. He would die like a criminal. He could've conquered the world and subjected all people to his almighty power, but then our greatest problems would still be there—the problems of sin and death. So unlike any other king in history, Jesus

willingly laid aside his glory, his power, his majesty to become a slave for you and me. He willingly took our crushing sins, our deserved punishment and our woeful death upon his own shoulders, so we would be truly free and forgiven in him, all because he loved us. **Blessed is he** who comes to save us!

**Blessed is he** and through him, **blessed are we!** There's something else that's striking in our text. It's not just Jesus' display of his power over all things or his willingness to go to the cross, but his disciples' simple trust in all of this. When he sent two of his disciples to go and get the colt, they don't ask a single question. There's no evidence that they were skeptical about what Jesus had to say. It doesn't seem that they hesitated to carry out his command. They simply went to the village and did what Jesus had sent them to do. They had already seen Jesus do far greater things than predict the future. Therefore they had come to simply trust what Jesus had to say.

Are we always like that? Do we always take Jesus at his word? When he makes a promise to be with us to the end of time, do we always go forward confident in his loving presence? When he promises to hear and answer our prayers, even to open the floodgates of heaven, are we always willing to let go of our dependence on self or our own skepticism and trust him? When he proclaims that the payment for our sins is finished, are we always quick to let go of the guilt of our sins? Sadly we're not always as trusting as those disciples, but we're more like them than we might think!

You see, just four days later, they failed to trust in Christ. In his hour of need, Jesus' disciples would completely abandon him and even publicly deny they knew him, but Jesus knew that and still he came to save both them and us. He comes to be there for us even when we've forsaken him. He comes to fulfill his promises with a perfect life and even death on a cross, because we can't. He comes to defeat that sinful self and the sinful world and Satan, so now by faith we can simply trust what Jesus tells us in his Word. How blessed we are!

Jesus' followers also showed their trust in him in how they welcomed him with the greatest love and honor they could. They were poor. They literally had nothing except the cloaks on their backs, but when Jesus needed a saddle, these followers took their only possessions and made a saddle for him. Others took their cloaks and spread them out on the ground so no dust would touch the King's foot. It didn't bother them that the foal might leave a mess behind. When they didn't have cloaks to throw down, they ran out and cut down palm branches to place in the roadway and to wave in honor of the King of kings—symbols of victory for the triumphant King. To top it all off, the pilgrim-packed streets of Jerusalem burst into jubilant song, ***"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!"***

Here we see how the plea of "Save us, please!" turned into a jubilant song of praise. King David's kingdom had long since turned to dust by the time Jesus entered Jerusalem, but by God's grace, some still trusted that the Lord would send his ideal King—the Messiah. The songs they sang came from Psalm 118, words very appropriate because that Psalm speaks of the Messiah's final victory, not with strength of arms and war horses, but with the gracious power of God. By singing these words to Jesus, his followers acknowledged that Jesus was the One for whom believers had longed for centuries. The plea of the endangered became the praise of the rescued.

Blessed are we when we welcome the King as well. Jesus came in hidden glory, yet still we welcome him as the King of kings. He deserves our obedience, because he came to save us. He suffered, so you would not. He died, so you would live. He conquered, so you would be free. Now in grateful obedience to your Savior King, you sing your hosannas day after day. You sing your hosannas with the loving words you use to build up your spouse or child or sibling or classmate or co-worker. You sing your hosannas with your priorities when you give top priority to the worship of your Savior King and to the study of his Word. You sing your hosannas when you awake each day confident that sin no longer has control over you and death will not destroy you, because Jesus won the eternal victory for you.

Blessed are we who follow the King. In the week ahead, he will show us even more why we are so blessed. We are his beloved and he will sacrifice it all for us. As the final notes of our praise disappear, the colt returns home. The Savior turns toward the cross. It's truly an unusual day because we have an unusual Savior, but we follow our Savior to the bitter and glorious end. He will humbly give himself to us in his Holy Supper. He will silently suffer and willingly die before our eyes, but his battle won't end there on the cross. Jesus will give us more reason to praise next Sunday. Blessed is he, then, for the Lord will finish what he has begun! For that reason and none other, blessed are we! ***"Hosanna in the highest!"*** Amen.