

Message for March 25, 2018 Palm Sunday

"Okay! What does Palm Sunday Mean to Me"

Luke 19: 29-40 NIV, 1633

²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ They replied, "The Lord needs it."³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: ³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" ⁴⁰ "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

Prayer:

1. Today is Palm Sunday. One week before Easter. You may be asking – "In the past this Sunday is called Palm and Passion Sunday --- why have I changed it back to just Palm Sunday? Well a good question. For the last 5 weeks we have been working with the theme of 24 hours that changed the world. During those times we looked at all of the events of the week leading up to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.
 - a. The time when Jesus stormed through the Temple and destroyed the money changers and scattered the vendors --- "This place is a place of prayer"
 - b. Then we remember the Upper Room and the introduction on the Passover Seder with what we now call Holy Communion.
 - c. Then there was the praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and the fact that the Disciples could not keep awake.
 - d. Then the Sanhedrin condemning Jesus to death because Jesus was beginning to really have an impact on their control of the people --- the people loved following Jesus more than the rabbis and the pharasesies.

- e. Finally --- Pilate released Barabbas instead of Jesus and Pilate turned Jesus over to be crucified.
2. We did the Passion of Jesus for several weeks instead of trying to cram it all in to one 20-minute message. We have had time to ponder and to think what the Passion of Jesus is all about.
3. So, we have heard today, the Scripture from the Gospel of Luke and it is a story that we know very well. The Palm Sunday story.
4. Let's look at some questions about Palm Sunday so that we can try to see just what does Palm Sunday mean to each of us and how can Palm Sunday affect our lives?
5. Why in the world did the crowd throw palm branches at his feet? Is it a sign of honor, respect and hope? It is!
6. Scholars and historians give us this answer for the why palm branches were thrown at His feet.
 - a. In summary, 150 years prior to Jesus, the Jews were conquered and oppressed by the Syrians. --- sound familiar!
 - b. This occupation was marked by abuse, violence and slavery; the Syrians even publicly disrespected and desecrated the Jew's most valued religious symbol: the temple.
 - c. Just when things were as bad as can be, a hero arose from the Jews and he led a revolt that ultimately culminated in the defeat of the Syrians and the restoration and re-dedication of the Temple.
 - d. This hero's name was Judas Maccabeus, and he gave the Jews their desires, happiness and success they longed for. Judas Maccabeus became their warrior king!
 - e. Therefore, he was received by the crowds celebrating his victory by waving palm branches.
7. Now, fast-forward 150 years. The Jews are being once again under someone else's control: Rome.
 - a. Though not as bad as the Syrians, the Jews, under the domination of the Romans, were still limited as to how much of their political and religious identity they could express --not to mention the forced tax burden by the Roman government.
8. Along comes Jesus who seems to have power from God, who seems to claim to be the long awaited Messiah, who reportedly has fed thousands at a time, the ever promised liberator of Israel who would come --once for all and as promised in the scriptures, to defeat Israel's enemies and set the Jews free as an independent powerful kingdom of which Jesus would be the king forever.

9. Jesus appeared to be the one who would give them their freedom, their desires, happiness and success they had longed for.
10. What's the people's reaction? To receive Jesus in the same way they had received their previous hero: waving palm branches.
11.Now, what does it mean for us today?
12. Although nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to 'celebrate' this one Sunday –with palm branches, I believe one possible lesson is given to us by Jesus himself.
 - a. The Jews used palm branches to receive Jesus according to their own thinking of who The Messiah should be –A conqueror king, a military leader --- to get rid of the Romans.
13. Once their ideas clashed with reality, they went from "save king!" to "crucify him!". When we read Luke's Gospel, we see Jesus disappointed (he wept over the city) and, apparently, He holds them accountable for not knowing what this time was all about: "If you had only known on this day what would bring you peace". Then, after what appears to be a prophecy about Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD, He says: "They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you".
14. May we remember this Palm Sunday that Jesus is not who we want Him to be according to our personal opinion, needs, desires or preconceptions.
 - a. Jesus is not primarily the one who will pay our bills or make things happen our way or give us success in all things.
15. May we remember this Palm Sunday that Jesus wants us to know Him through His Word, to know who He is: our savior, our king, our father. That Jesus did not come to serve us but to save us and send us out. He did not come to make us happy or successful but to make us holy and separated unto Him for good works -to save all who are lost.
16. As I began to read the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, a few things stood out as peculiar. As a child, I held palm branches and yelled "Hosanna!"
 - a. I really didn't know the true meaning of those actions.
 - b. I just did it. I went along with the crowd. Just like the crowd with Pilate and Barabbas.
 - c. I have to wonder if some of the people, who had journeyed to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival, held the palm branches and yelled "Hosanna," but wondered why.
17. What was so significant about this moment?
18. In Jesus' time on earth, palm branches meant triumph or honor.

- a. It was a political statement indicating that they were saved.
- b. Their hero, Jesus, was going to rescue them from their current suffering under Roman rule.

19. In fact, the term they yelled, 'Hosanna,' means "save now please." Initially, the word had a deep meaning of God's power to save. Hosanna then transitioned into a joyous shout of praise or victory.

20. We realize that the crowd was throwing and swaying palm branches and shouting "Hosanna" because they thought Jesus was going to save them immediately from the domination of the Romans

21. We know from the Gospels, that the crowd had known and experienced miracles first hand. They had seen Jesus in action.

22. So, what changed? How did they go from believing that Jesus was going to save them to putting Him on the cross?

23. Personally, I think the crowd had a small knowledge of Jesus. They only wanted what He could do for them and not who He was. Luke 19:41 tells us that Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Why did He weep? He wept because He could see their rejection.

24. They didn't understand that Jesus was coming to save them from themselves. They couldn't see how they needed a Savior to rescue them from their personal sins. They thought Jesus would come and wipe out all of their enemies. They didn't want any more hardships. They wanted the easy road.

25. In contrast, Jesus wanted to save their souls. Jesus wanted to empower them to love their enemies. Jesus wanted them to overcome the world as He has overcome the world.

26. Jesus wanted the narrow road. Jesus wanted a relationship.

27. He wants you—every bit of you. He doesn't want to be a genie in the bottle. He wants to walk this life with you and teach you, encourage you, rebuke you and love you. He wants you to know who He is.

28. So I need to answer the initial question – "What does Palm Sunday mean to me?"

29. Charles L. Campbell states it plainly when he writes that Luke's version of the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the back of a colt is "one of the wildest and most politically explosive acts of Jesus' ministry.

30. The story is a reminder of the political challenge of Jesus' ministry.

- a. The event should not be limited to an opening processional in which people smile at cute children waving palm branches"

31. Campbell suggests that we should pay close attention not only to the final part of the story, in which Jesus rides into Jerusalem amidst the crowds of people who throw palm branches and cloaks along his path,
- a. Jesus' actions in Jerusalem intended to turn the establishment's worldly notions of power upside down.
 - b. It is a public act of subversion. And clearly it worked.
 - c. For after his procession it would be only a few days before Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, and executed for his treasonous act.
32. This morning's Scripture begins on the Mount of Olives, which is the traditional place from which people expected the final military campaign for Jerusalem's liberation to begin, Jesus doesn't adorn himself with armor or mount a war horse.
- a. Jesus chooses instead to ride this traditional war path astride a colt.
 - b. Jesus comes not as a military hero, but as one of the poor, the downtrodden, the vulnerable.
33. Through this act he communicates his intent to both the political powers and those they oppress. Physically, spiritually, emotionally, and personally he aligns himself with the least among us. He chooses not just to stand with the poor, but to join with them in their walk, no matter where the road leads.
- 34. And he calls his disciples to join him in this march. Physically.**
- a. It's no wonder that as the week played out the disciples would desert him and deny knowing him, and then lock themselves in a room and hide in order to save themselves after his execution.
35. Jesus' action that we gather to remember this morning is not of a pretty parade scene with children smiling and laughing and singing and waving palm branches in a sanctuary. This action is political. It is bold. It is divisive. It is physical. And it is deadly.
- 36. Politics is physical. Loving others is physical. Talking, hurting, disagreeing, shedding tears, becoming angry, putting boots on the ground to go into the military, or the mission field, or to march in protest on behalf of another—these acts involve our bodies.**
37. Loving others in the way of Jesus is embodied. It is political. It is active.
38. Being the body of Christ is physical because Jesus is physical.
- a. Jesus is God in flesh. Emmanuel. God with us.
 - b. Physically dead, physically raised, physically present with us in the faces and bodies of the poor, the downtrodden, the oppressed, the hurting, the dying, and the recovering.

- c. Physically present on the faces of people being deported or living in war zones and refugee camps.
- d. Physically present in the terrified bodies of people running from gunshots at a country music concert.
- e. Physically present in the raised arms of people protesting in the streets.
- f. Physically present in the world and in the body of Christ as we seek to love God, love our neighbors, and love ourselves.

39. As disciples of Jesus Christ we must embrace Jesus' call to embody our love through our physical actions.

- a. We can't refuse Jesus.
- b. We can't deny Jesus.
- c. We can't close our eyes or look away.
- d. We can't back off out of fear.
- e. We must follow Jesus straight through the screaming crowds as he confronts the power structures of the world that would place its treasures in the hands of a very few while leaving the majority of God's creatures suffering.

40. As we begin the walk of Holy Week with our Lord, let us focus on the importance of the physical: fully embodying the rituals of our faith tradition in both ancient and modernized ways.

- a. As we listen to the story of our Lord's passion, let us enter fully into the physicality of suffering and death, that we may also enter fully into the physicality of resurrection come Easter morning.**

41. Thanks be to God