Triumphal Entry

Luke 19:28-40

This Sunday is often called Palm Sunday. It commemorates the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem proclaiming himself to be king. Many people recognized that Jesus was, in fact, king so they greeted him accordingly. Today we have seen political rallies and when the president shows up, the crowd makes a lot of joyful noise. The people were greeting Jesus with this kind of enthusiasm.

Two weeks ago we looked at the arrest of Jesus and we noted that he was in control. He could have called legions of angels for help. He could have simply ordered the soldiers to go away. He was in control and his arrest was part of God’s plan and Jesus was committed to follow it through. Last week we looked at the trials of Jesus and again noted that he was in control. Jesus did not respond to the false accusations. He did not call on the powers of heaven to set him free. This was part of God’s plan for salvation and he was committed to seeing it through. Palm Sunday shows still more clearly that Jesus was in control. He is riding toward Jerusalem on a donkey which no one else has ever ridden. The Apostles placed their coats on the donkey for Jesus to sit on. This was done for a king and Jesus was demonstrating his kingship for all to see.

As we look at Palm Sunday and the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem we can see that this event did not just happen by chance. This event had been planned out in advance. Some try to see a miracle in the owner of the colt allowing the disciples to untie it and take it to Jesus. It is so much more likely that at some earlier time arrangements had been made for the colt to be tied and waiting. Jesus knew it would be tied at the prearranged spot. Then, there was the password, “The Lord needs it.” When the owner heard this he knew it was in the right hands. Just as so many of the things Jesus did, this was planned. Jesus is fulfilling the prophecies about him and his plan to give salvation to believers.

This act of riding from Bethany on a donkey is also full of meaning. Most people today think of a donkey as a lowly beast of burden, however when Jesus rode this animal toward Jerusalem he was claiming kingship. Kings rode donkeys when they came in peace. Kings only rode horses when they were going out to war. We can read of King David riding his donkey when he moved about. By riding the donkey, Jesus was saying that he was coming to Jerusalem as the king and he is the king of peace.

Can you imagine this scene? There were hundreds, maybe thousands, of people shouting as Jesus rode along. They ran ahead and placed their cloaks on the ground for him to ride over. Then they called out, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord,” and “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” The other Gospels tell us that the people called out “Hosanna” and “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” and similar phrases. The people were declaring that Jesus is king and that he has come in the name of the Lord. And, in fact he has. They got this right. There was a lot of excitement. The people were demonstrating the hope they had and the joy of knowing that God’s Messiah has finally come to His people. There was so much excitement and such noise that all of the town must have heard the commotion. The people were excited to be in the presence of their Messiah and they let that joy show.

There were Pharisees nearby and of course they were watching all that was happening. This troubled them for two reasons. The reason they would put forth publicly is that the Romans also must have heard the commotion and the people were declaring that Jesus is king. This would threaten the authority of Rome over Israel and all knew the power of the Roman army. If someone comes to town and claims to be king, this would probably cause the Roman army to take action to stop anything that appeared to be rebellion. The people were running along calling Jesus a king. They were putting their coats in the road for him to travel on. Those that did not have an optional article of clothing cut branches off of nearby trees and placed those branches in the road. That is why this Sunday is called Palm Sunday. Many of the trees around were palm trees so that is what the people put in the road: palm branches. A more accurate name may be Cloak Sunday, but for a number of reasons, today is Called Palm Sunday.

Can you imagine the commotion as Jesus was riding a donkey colt across the Kidron Valley enroute to Jerusalem? People calling out and cutting tree branches caused the Pharisees to tell Jesus to rebuke those who were honoring Jesus. They were worried about the Romans coming but Jesus refused to quiet the people because what they were doing was finally recognizing who Jesus is. They saw their king and they called out to honor him.

There is another reason that the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke those who were celebrating. Jesus did not conform to the teaching of the Pharisees. Jesus actually challenged the teachings and the activities of the Pharisees. Jesus taught salvation by faith and they taught salvation by keeping the Law. Even the Pharisees could not keep the Law but they challenged the people to keep the law. Jesus taught that there were two great commandments; first, Love the Lord with all of your heart and mind and soul and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself.

The Pharisees wanted to require the people to follow the Scribal Law which could not be done and it did not glorify God. Jesus healed on the Sabbath and this upset the Pharisees. He taught that the Sabbath was made for man. How far you walked really did not matter but the Scribal Law limited how far a person could walk on the Sabbath. The Pharisees prayed in the market place with their hands held high and they prayed loudly so the people would see them and proclaim, “My, how religious.” Jesus said to go into your own room to pray and God will hear you. The Pharisees had people with trumpets go into the market before them so all around would know they were giving alms. Jesus said to give privately and God would honor that kind of giving. The Pharisees thought they had authority in the Nation of Israel but Jesus showed real authority comes from God and not from man. The Pharisees needed to be reminded of Hosea 6:6. Here we can see that God told us through the Prophet Hosea that God desires mercy and not sacrifice and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings. The Pharisees were focusing on burnt offerings and the people were acknowledging the Lord among them. Then in Micah 6:8 we read, “He has shown you O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

The Pharisees hated Jesus because he upset their system of religion. They felt they were very important in the old system but Jesus taught who was really important. Jesus taught salvation by faith and the Pharisees taught salvation by doing the right things: even though no one could keep all of the Law. The Pharisees focused on burnt offerings but God calls for acknowledgement of who He really is.

Jesus answered the Pharisees with an amazing answer in verse 40. The Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke the people; make then be quiet. Jesus said, “…if they are quiet, the stones will cry out.” Can you imagine what the Pharisees must have thought? Will the stones cry out? Jesus said they would.

Two things come to mind when I read this passage. First, Nature does show God’s glory to those who will see it and second, you can be replaced by a rock. Romans 1:20 tells us that there is no excuse for not seeing the glory of God because it is all around in that which he has created. This theme is mentioned many times throughout Scripture. Look at that which has been created and you will see the trees and the skies and the mountains proclaiming the glory of God. Just watch a seed sprout and send up a chute toward the sky and as it grows it reaches upward. Nature does point to a glorious God.

The second thing that comes to mind to mind when I consider Jesus saying the stones would praise him if the people did not. Do you think you are pretty important? Be careful! Jesus said that he will be praised. People get the first opportunity to praise him but if people do not praise him, the stones will. Can you imagine? Do you want to be replaced by a rock? If you do not praise him you can be replaced and it will not be difficult. When the praise from mankind stops the rocks on the ground will begin to praise him. God will be praised.

Isn’t that something? God will be praised and we get first shot at that. What a privilege we have. But how shameful it would be to be replaced by a dumb rock. How humbling, how shameful it would be to be replaced by a rock.

Some 2000 years ago Jesus was riding a new donkey toward Jerusalem and the people were running along and before him and they were calling out identifying him as the long awaited Messiah. They saw their king coming and they praised him. Yes, their attitude would change in the week ahead but Jesus remains the Messiah. He is the Christ of God and he has shown us all the way to enjoy eternal salvation.

Mankind is sinful. No one likes to hear that but it is true. We need to hear that we are sinful. No one is righteous, no not one. But take heart, Jesus has overcome the world and he cleared the way for people to be reconciled to God.

Jesus made it clear that he is the One who was to come to save people from their sins and reconcile them to God. He is the Only Son of God that God gave because He loves the world. During the last few weeks we have seen that Jesus was arrested even though he could have resisted that. Then he was tried in a non-legitimate court and he was accused by liars of many different things. He was handed over to the Romans to be beaten and scourged and mocked and then crucified. He could have gotten away from Pilate and the Romans but he went along quietly. He went to the cross to pay for your sins so you can be reconciled with God.

Have you told him that you believe what he did? Have you told him that you are a sinner and need his help? Do you really trust that he alone can help you to be reconciled to God? He is the way and there is no other. On this Palm Sunday, do you praise Jesus or do you wait for the stones to praise him?