

## Palm Sunday

### Text: Matthew 21:1-11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” <sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: <sup>5</sup>“Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. <sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup>They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. <sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’ <sup>10</sup>When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this?’ <sup>11</sup>The crowds answered, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.’”

### Who Is This?

Jesus had everything arranged on Palm Sunday so that Jerusalem would take note of His arrival. He rode into town on a donkey while crowds ahead and behind Him shouted, “Hosanna!” People spread palm branches and their coats on the road as a sign of homage. It stirred the city so much, that all the people wondered who this Man might be. They asked, “Who is this?”

I. The holidays introduce many people to Jesus.

As much as Jesus is being taken out of Christmas, people still see that it has something to do with Jesus. People know that there is something special about Christmas because most people get off work. They hear Christmas carols in the stores and on the radio. They see manger scenes. Our whole country is stirred at Christmas. It has to cause many people to wonder, “Who is this Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem?”

The same thing could be said of Easter. For the last six weeks, we have been in the season of Lent. Many of you have come here to eat and worship on Wednesday evenings. I wonder how many of our neighbors wondered why there are suddenly so many cars in the parking lot every Wednesday. This coming week is Holy Week. We come to special services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Sometimes all those special services lead to conflicts with other things. When we say that we are going to church, people are often left wondering why? Although Easter has also become associated with the Easter bunny and the beginning of spring, even though it snows more often on Easter than on Christmas, people know that it has to do with Jesus.

Christmas and Easter draw the attention of many people. People who would not otherwise think of Jesus, are drawn to Him whether they want it to or not.

There are many other things that we as Christians do, which draw the attention of people to Jesus in a good way or a bad way. When your neighbors see your car leaving the driveway every Sunday

morning, they might wonder what it is that draws you here. The cross or other Christian symbols, which you wear around your neck or on your lapel, might get people wondering what that means. When you send your children to a Lutheran school, people often wonder why you would spend all that money when you are already paying too much money in taxes. Such things can make people wonder why Jesus is so important to us.

On the other hand, sometimes we do things that make people wonder about Jesus in a negative way. When people know that we are a Christian, but we lie, cheat, and steal in our business practices, or when we live in immoral ways, it also makes them take notice. When churches make the head lines, it always seems to be in bad ways. What does that say about Jesus? My classic example is someone who has a bumper sticker on their car that says, "I ♥ Jesus." Then they make an obscene gesture when someone cuts them off. Such things also make people wonder about Jesus. Our teaching and behavior as Christians make people take notice. What does it make them think about Jesus?

II. Many people do receive Him in the wrong way.

The answer that was given on Palm Sunday was, "*This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.*" While the crowds acknowledged that He is a religious man, it was not enough. In Caesarea Philippi Jesus asked the disciples, "*Who to people say that I am?*" One of the answers was, "*One of the prophets.*" Many people confessed that Jesus was a prophet during His ministry, but that was not enough. They didn't recognize that He was the promised Savior, so just a few days later when another crowd shouted, "Crucify Him!" not a single one of them stood up to defend Him.

He is often received in the same way today. I wonder how many people sing along with the "Hallelujah Chorus" when they hear it on the radio, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," but they never give any thought to what it means. There are also many people today who believe that Jesus was some kind of great religious leader. He was compassionate. He stood up for the poor and downtrodden. He taught us to love our enemies and to forgive. But they do not believe that He is their Savior. Too often today when Jesus' name is mocked and when His people are persecuted, there is as much silence in defense of Him as there was before Pilate on Good Friday. The Hosannas were silenced by the cries to crucify Him on Good Friday. All the nice things that are spoken about Him during Christmas and Easter are often silenced when it becomes dangerous to confess Him.

III. How then shall we receive Him?

In his Advent hymn, Paul Gerhardt asks that question,

O Lord how shall I meet Thee,  
 How welcome Thee aright?  
 Thy people long to greet Thee  
 My hope, my hearts delight!  
 O kindle, Lord, most holy,  
 Thy lamp within my breast  
 To do in spirit lowly  
 All that may please Thee best.

How should the people have greeted Him on Palm Sunday? How should we greet Him when His

Word is preached to us and when we receive His supper? We want to welcome Him in the right way, but what is the right way?

The answer is that we welcome Him in faith. Three weeks ago our Gospel lesson was about the Samaritan woman at the well. After Jesus revealed that He knew everything about her, she said, “*Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.*” (Jn 4:19) However, at the end of the story she ran into town and asked, “*Could this be the Christ?*” Two weeks ago, we heard the story of the blind man whom Jesus healed. (Jn 9) At first when the pharisees interrogated him, he said that Jesus is a prophet. However, after he was cast out of the synagogue, Jesus found him and asked, “*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*” The man said, “*Lord, I believe,*” and He worshiped Jesus.” Last week we heard of Martha’s sorrow over the death of her brother Lazarus. (Jn 11) When Jesus arrived, He said to her, “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.*” Martha answered, “*Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.*” On Easter Sunday Thomas didn’t believe that Jesus rose from the dead, but when He saw the risen Lord a week later, he confessed, “*My Lord and my God.*”

That is how we receive Jesus in the right way. We don’t see Him as a prophet or a religious leader. He is the Christ. He is my Savior. We come to worship Him because He rode into Jerusalem to take away all of our sins. We celebrated His birth a short time ago because God gave us His most precious gift. We remember His death on the cross because it was there where He paid for all of our sins. We celebrate Easter every Sunday because He has risen as our eternal Savior. Jesus Christ is the one who has conquered sin, death, and all the power of the devil for us. There is a reason why we are willing to take up our crosses and follow Him, why we confess Him even in the midst of danger, and why we will be mocked for following Him. We know that He loves us, He has saved us, and that nothing can ever separate us from His wonderful love.

“Who is Jesus?” A lot more people ponder that question than we realize. What do our words and deeds give as an answer? Do we simply show that He must have been some kind of religious leader or do we show our faith that He is the Christ, the Son of God, who has saved us from sin, death, and all the power of the devil. May God enable each of us to receive Him in faith and to have that confession of faith in Christ shine out to a world what wonders who He is.

Amen

***Pastor Don Hougard  
Benediction Lutheran Church  
Milwaukee, WI  
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