

April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## Matthew 21:1-11 “Come See Something Different”

One of the things I love most about studying the Bible is how the Holy Spirit works through my understanding of what I read. You ever read a familiar passage of scripture and get something completely different out of it than the last time you read it? Sort of like the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm or the story of David and Goliath, or the parable of the Prodigal Son or the Lord’s Prayer. And it’s especially powerful when a teacher is there to help you see the scripture in a different light. I remember this Men’s retreat I led back in Virginia where Bill Lee, pastor of the Loudon Avenue Christian Church, was our keynote speaker. The whole weekend was a study on the Lord’s Prayer. It’s a familiar passage. A lot of folks have this memorized. We incorporate it into our weekly routine at church. It’s familiar enough that even people who don’t go to church say, “Oh wait, I’ve heard that before!” Bill did an amazing thing that weekend at the Men’s Retreat ... he helped us see the Lord’s prayer as if for the first time. The phrase that caught my attention that weekend was, “Give us this day our daily bread.” And we say it that way too, don’t we? “Giveusthisday, our dai-ly bread.” We say it with sort of a ¾ time waltz beat. But oftentimes we don’t think about what it really means. Well Rev. Lee pulled us out of our comfort zone one morning. He got us out of the habit of *reciting* the Lord’s prayer and challenged us to actually *pray* the Lord’s prayer. He had us reflect on what it means for God to provide for us *every day* and how we never need to be anxious about the *next* day’s portion of bread. Be grateful for *this* day’s bread. The Hebrew people didn’t have to worry about tomorrow’s mana, they were given *this* day’s mana. That changed my whole perspective on that part of the Lord’s Prayer and to this day, when I pray the Lord’s Prayer, it’s “give us *this* day, our daily bread.”

So yeah, it’s great when you can look at a scripture with fresh eyes, and what you learn from it brings you *joy* because now it’s more meaningful. You know what *isn’t* so great? When you learn something about a scripture that changes the way you look at it in a not so good way. Or

maybe I should say, “In a way that challenges your preconceived notions.” Especially if you’ve built traditions around the *old* understanding. So I apologize in advance because I’m about ready to ruin your Palm Sunday service. Actually, that’s not fair. I guess what I should say is that I’m going to challenge us to look at Palm Sunday in a new way this morning.

When we think of Palm Sunday, what’s the first thing that comes to mind? For our church, it’s children and the choir dancing into the sanctuary waving palms in the air singing the “Le Lo Lay Lo” song or “All Glory Laud and Honor” or one of those other happy tunes we sing on Palm Sunday. I think we see it as kind of a break in the Lenten season where we don’t have to be so darn solemn and reflective and introspective. We get to dance with the crowd, wave palms and sing “hosanna!” But *what does* “hosanna” mean? I think we sort of treat the word as a substitute or a synonym for “hallelujah” which makes sense, because in so many church traditions, we’re supposed to suppress our “hallelujah’s” during Lent so that we can appreciate them more on Resurrection Day! Saying “hosanna” a week before Easter sometimes feels like someone saying, “It’s okay honey, I know we have another week of Lent, but you can go ahead and have a piece of chocolate today ... but *just* today.” But “hosanna” is *not* another word for “hallelujah.” Hallelujah means, “God be praised!” Want to know what “hosanna” means? Oh no you don’t preacher ... don’t you dare! I’m going to go look on Dictionary.com before you can say a word! Hah! It says it’s a “biblical expression to express adoration, praise or joy!” Don’t you take my palm branches away from me pastor! I won’t. But let me tell you what it means, and maybe it will make sense. “Hosanna” is a Greek word, but it’s a transliteration of two Hebrew words, “yasha” and “anna” which when you put it all together means “save us, please.”

Well that’s not so bad preacher. I mean, that makes sense when you consider that Jesus came to save us. Yes! It does. But it changes the character of this whole Palm Sunday scene doesn’t it? Think of it this way: When someone is happy and everything is going well, why would

they be yelling, “Help me! Save me, please!” It makes about as much sense as someone who is in over their head in choppy water flailing around saying, “Praise, joy, and adoration!” So I think the question we have to ask when we read this story about Jesus’ final entry into Jerusalem is, “Why were the people shouting, ‘save us?’” Save us from *what*? From whom? Some people would say, “Well, to save us from our sins of course!” Okay, but do you really think *that* was what on the people’s minds when he came in through that back door into Jerusalem? Save us from our sins is “*inner* work” stuff. I’m pretty sure that there were plenty of *external* forces at work that were causing these people to feel in need of rescue. Save us from poverty. Save us from sickness. Save us from the rule of Caesar whose reign is marked by the rich trampling on the poor.

Now this doesn’t mean that there wasn’t excitement on that day nor does it mean that people weren’t happy to see him. That’s clearly not the case. If I thought otherwise, I wouldn’t have started the service today with the “Le-lo-lay-lo” song. Verse 8 and 9 says, “They spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’” *And*, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” So yes, they were saying “save us” but they gathered together and spread their palms and cloaks on the ground because they believed that Jesus *could* save them. So I didn’t *completely* ruin your Palm Sunday did I? We can *still* wave our palms and shout “Hosannah!” In fact let’s do it – “Hosannah!” Which means ... “Save us.”

But again ... from what? From *what* do we need to be saved in this time and place in history? Now here’s where it’s easy to go all introspective and say, “our sins.” But let’s face it ... in the same way the people in Jesus’ time had more immediate and external concerns, we’re in the same boat as they were. I’m not going to make a list for you or read this morning’s headlines to emphasize the mess that is our world right now. We’ve heard enough of that. We are at the saturation point, let’s let this

time and place be safe space. What we're longing to hear now is, "How or what can this One who comes in the name of the Lord do for us right now?" When we say, "Save us, Son of David, the one who is blessed and who comes in the name of the Lord," what are we expecting him to do to save us from ... all this? No one else seems to be helping much. You've got some people saying that this is all just a hoax and we're blowing it out of proportion. Then a few days later, the same people are saying, "Okay, this isn't a hoax, and we *do* need to take this seriously" but then in the same breath say, "but we also have to save our economy, so maybe we should just buck up and let the virus thin the herd a bit so we can get back to business as usual." Lord, please save us!

Let's look at these last two verses ... 9 and 10. The NRSV says that when Jesus got past the gate and into Jerusalem, "The whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'" When Jesus came to town, it didn't just automatically bring this wave of equilibrium and peace and then everyone calmed down and said, "Whew ... everything's going to okay now. Jesus is here!" If anything, Jesus' presence stirred up all sorts of turmoil. And it's in the midst of this turmoil that Jesus continues to embody this incredible love and radical grace. This is an important piece. It's easy to fall into the idea that, "If we're faithful, then we shouldn't be in turmoil." Because let's face it, sometimes it's our faith that calls us *into* turmoil. Think about it – Jesus knew that he was riding into Jerusalem for the last time. This is where the showdown begins. This entry into Jerusalem is the first step in Jesus' path to the cross. Talk about walking into turmoil! For me, this story shows that Jesus leads us to abundant life even in the midst of turmoil. And here we are as a church who is dedicated to following the path of Jesus, reading this story, knowing that when we decide to follow Jesus, we're committed to following him *all the way* ... even into the turmoil that will eventually lead to his crucifixion. Told you this was going to be a challenging Lenten Season.

So where *are* we going? Where *is* this path going to lead us? Is it going to end as badly for us as it did for Jesus? If these are the questions that you're asking, guess what? You're doing Lent right! Those are *exactly* the questions we need to be asking as we enter into Holy Week. We don't get to go from singing happy songs on Palm Sunday to singing happy songs on Easter without taking time to follow Jesus to the cross. So I encourage you to be here for our Maundy Thursday service Thursday evening at 7:00, where we will unite as Disciples of Christ with the first disciples of Christ as they shared their last meal with Jesus.

If you can't be here Thursday evening, please read John 13 – 19 before you join us next Sunday for Resurrection day. It's important as disciples of Christ that you experience these chapters before we hear the message of the Resurrection.