

Palm Sunday

Mission: Hosanna!

Mark 11:1-10

There is a legend about an ancient village in Spain. The villagers learned that the king would pay a visit. In a thousand years, a king had never come to that village. Excitement grew. "We must throw a big celebration!" The villagers all agreed. But, it was a poor village, and there weren't many resources. Someone came up with a classic idea. Since many of the villagers made their own wines, the idea was for everyone in the village bring a large cup of their choice wine to the town square. They said, "We'll pour it into a large vat and offer it to the king for his pleasure! When the king draws wine to drink, it will be the very best he's ever tasted!" The day before the king's arrival, hundreds of people lined up to make their offering to the honored guest. They climbed a small stairway, and poured their gift through a small opening at the top. Finally, the vat was full! The King arrived, was escorted to the square, given a silver cup and was told to draw some wine, which represented the best the villagers had. He placed the cup under the spigot, turned the handle, and then drank the wine, but it was nothing more than water. You see, every villager reasoned, "I'll withhold my best wine and substitute water. What with so many cups of wine in the vat, the king will never know the difference!" The problem was, everyone thought the same thing, and the king was greatly dishonored.

Palm Sunday is all about a day when the King of Kings was greatly honored. Because people gave the very best they had – a gift of praise.

This day marks the beginning of the end for Jesus' earthly life.

The first day in what was to be his last week.

His weekend would take him to a cross on Friday morning, into a tomb on Friday night and all day Saturday, then ultimately result in Him being raised to life again on Sunday morning.

I. Jesus' Mission: To Save

Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day on a mission.

It was Passover.

The greatest of all the Jewish feasts, and people from all over Israel made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate this holiday commemorating God's mighty work of freeing the Jews from Egyptian bondage during the days of Moses.

Jesus, already having traveled and taught and performed miracles over the past three years was making what would turn out to be his last trip to this Holy City.

He knew what would happen there...how He would be treated...how He would die.

But He had a mission.

Just a few days earlier he had made the statement, "*For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost.*" (Luke 19:10)

The word Hosanna literally means "Save!"

"Save!" the crowd shouted. I wonder if Jesus thought, "That's exactly what I'm here to do. How right you are, but how little you understand."

Without knowing the details, the crowd was clearly articulating what Jesus came to do.

As Jesus rode into town, the people let loose with joyous, uninhibited praise.

A crowd of people, probably from His home region of Galilee, gather and shout Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

By Jesus' time, Hosanna had become a common shout of Jewish praise to God.

Hosanna literally meant to save

To say Hosanna was to praise.

The text says the people were laying things down before Jesus.

Their cloaks and branches from the fields.

By spreading their coats on the road, as well as freshly cut branches, it was their version of rolling out the red carpet.

What a scene that must have been. The Pharisees told Jesus He ought to rebuke his disciples.

Jesus said, "*I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out!*" (Luke 19:40)

God deserves praise. And if people won't do it, His Creation will continue to cry out.

Majestic mountains, mighty oceans, the expansive stars of the universe, sun, moon, stars, trees, hills and yes even rocks scream forth the praises of the Creator – the One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The One who also happened to ride into Jerusalem on an inauspicious donkey to face a cruel death at the hands of sinful men.

Close your eyes and imagine something.

I want you to imagine your street – the street on which you live. Picture in your mind

what that street looks like – where you live – where the trees are – where the other houses or apartments are – where people park their cars – the general amount of traffic that is typically on your street. Imagine yourself standing outside next to your street very close to where you live. Got that picture?

Now I want you to imagine that coming down your street you spot a crowd of people.

And in the middle of that crowd of people is a man riding on a donkey. You recognize the man as Jesus. People are laying things down. Some of your neighbors are rushing to the curb to lay things down too. Jesus approaches where you are standing, riding closer, as He passes by what do you lay down?

Key question: If Jesus came riding down your street, what would you lay down before Him?

II. Our Mission: To Praise

To praise Jesus is essentially to give Him a compliment.

It can be done publicly or privately.

It can be done in a variety of ways.

(Spoken words, printed words, words that are sung in a song. Can be painted, signed with hands, or even performed through drama or dance – just about any mode of communication is an avenue for praise)

It's what we've been called to do: *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* (1 Peter 2:9)

Part of our mission, if we're followers of Jesus is to praise.....

So again we need to ask ourselves this key question: If Jesus came riding down your street, what would you lay down before Him?

To answer that best we should consider if there is anything standing in the way of our ability to praise.

What kinds of things inhibit our praise?

Pride?

We may not want to admit it, but perhaps pride stands in the way of our praise.

I wonder if sometimes we might overlook pride as it relates to praise by referring to it as temperament.

We might say, "Well, by nature, I'm just not a very expressive person. My temperament doesn't lend itself to the kind of praise that took place on that first Palm Sunday. I'm too reserved."

I'll tell someone who is not reserved. Roberto Benigni. He's the Italian guy who won the "Oscar" for best actor for the film "Life Is Beautiful."

I don't watch the Academy Awards, but I read that upon hearing his name called, Roberto Benigni leaped to his feet ... threw his arms in the air ... skipped across the tops of the seats ... bounded to the stage ... squeezed Sophia Loren so tightly that he nearly crushed her... and then rambled (in half-English, half-Italian) about "this being a moment of colossal joy," and wanting to "kiss everybody and die in this ocean of generosity. "This being the same man who once bear-hugged the Pope, kissing him over and over, while calling him "Babbo" ... or "Daddy." Leading the Pope to say: "You are very Italian."

Roberto Benigni would have fit right in on Palm Sunday. He'd have no problem throwing down his coat and waving a palm branch.

There was another guy who came up to get his Oscar that year ... shortly after Benigni received his. And, in expressing his gratitude, this very reserved gentlemen, whose name I do not know, began by saying: "Inside, I feel like Roberto Benigni." And the audience chuckled.

Now that's temperament. The second man was just as grateful, but he expressed it in a different way.

Praise to Jesus can be offered in many different ways, just as sincerely by someone who raises their hands and dances and by someone who bows their head in reverent respect.

So how might we sometimes confuse temperament with pride?

When we don't engage praise when we have the opportunity, and shrug it off as temperament, or just being reserved, we're kidding ourselves.

If Jesus came riding down your street if it's pride standing in the way of praise, would you be willing to lay it down?

Fear?

Perhaps fear at times stands in our way of praise.

The classic example I think of when someone had opportunity to put in a good word for Jesus, and was just too scared to do it is Peter.

You know after Jesus had been arrested, Peter sort of lurked behind in the shadows to see how things would turn out.

Someone said to him, "You were with Nazarene, Jesus, weren't you?"

What a perfect opportunity for Peter say, "I sure was. And let me tell you about Him.

I saw Him heal a deaf man, cause a blind man to see and make a cripple walk.

One time I saw Him stand up in a boat during a storm and when he yelled at the wind the storm stopped.

I saw him walk on water.

I've even seen Him bring people back to life – just this past week He did that again for a guy named Lazarus.

Jesus is innocent. He's the Son of God – yes I follow Him and I proudly call Him my Lord."

But of course, Peter didn't say that. He said, "*I don't know what you're talking about.*"

Within a few moments he denied knowing Jesus two more times.

He could have praised, but he was afraid.

Sometimes it is scary to praise Jesus.

We don't know what people might think of us if we really let loose with genuine Palm Sunday praise.

But if Jesus came riding down your street, and if it's fear that stands in your way of praise, would you be willing to lay it down?

Doubt?

Or if could be that doubt hinders your ability to praise Jesus.

Have you ever seen a bull fight – news flash they kill the bull

If you ever see it there will be a lot of people watching and cheering and yet you may find yourself wondering if you should be cheering or not because you might have some questions that need answering

Maybe some of you have a similar feeling when you are surrounded by people who are praising Jesus. You may think, "I know a lot of others are really into this.

I'm just not sure if I should be applauding. I have some serious questions that need to get answered before I can praise."

It's tough to praise when you have doubts

I think about a novel called *The Flight of Peter Fromm*. Peter Fromm was a young man with Midwestern roots wanting to be a minister and the high minded idealism that he, as a Christian, could enroll at the University of Chicago Divinity School, face the challenges of liberal theology, which has lost faith in miracles, the inspiration of Scripture and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and make a difference for Jesus Christ. The book chronicles how day after day Peter's faith is confronted by intellectual arguments he's never considered, and almost imperceptibly at first instead of his faith changing the trends of the academic environment around him, the environment changes him. At the end of the book he stands before a church in Chicago on Easter Sunday to preach a sermon, no longer sure of what he believes. As he attempts to tell the congregation about the wonder of the resurrection of Jesus Christ – something he is no longer sure of himself – the inner battle between what he believes and what he is saying overcomes him. He suffers a mental breakdown right there at the pulpit and has to be physically restrained by some people in the congregation. That's an extreme case, but it just goes to show that doubts can really get in the way of praise – even sometimes for those who want to praise.

I know this is a tough one...

But if Jesus came riding down your street, and if it's doubt that's standing in the way of your ability praise, would you at least be willing to consider laying it down?

If you're willing, I'm certain He'll help you with those doubts.

It could even be... Possessions, Sin, Sadness/Burdens/Worries stand in your way of praise
Whatever it is, would you be willing to lay it down?

You are probably here today because you know that where He is going is better than where you are now...
that what He is offering is better than what you have now...
and what He is asking is better than the agenda you have set for yourself

That's why Palm Sunday means something to you.

So praise! At church – sing, clap, raise your hands, close your eyes, bow your head – don't confuse temperament with pride

(Ps 150)

When I consider the story of that first Palm Sunday, I am struck by the thought that...

A coat might not be worth much after a donkey walks on it.

In a crowd like that there was no guarantee that once you laid it down you were ever going to get it back.

For some reason, the text leads me to believe those people probably weren't real interested in coats at that moment when Jesus rode by.

No, these people, many of them probably very poor, weren't as concerned about coats as they were about praise.

For the people on Palm Sunday, praising Jesus might have cost them something. That sounds a little bit like a sacrifice.

The Bible speaks of a sacrifice of praise.

Fitting, isn't it, for someone who saved our lives by sacrificing His own?