

The Rev. Joshua Wullenweber
Palm Sunday
Mark 11:1-11
Sunday, March 24, 2024

We began our worship service this morning, hearing the familiar words of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem for that last time. We heard and were reminded of how the crowds came out and celebrated the arrival of the long awaited Messiah - as they took off their cloaks, laid them on the ground. As they took palm branches, waved them in the air and laid them before the path the colt walked. And as they shouted at the top of their lungs - blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest.

Now this joyful celebration is the same story we hear every Palm Sunday as we prepare to enter the time of Holy Week and those great three days before Easter. Now like with many of these stories if we're not careful, we can overlook some of the unique intricacies that this sacred account presents. Intricacies that give us insight for our journeys of faith here in this time, and place. See nuanced among the words of celebration we hear this morning are subtle words for us to ponder as we too prepare to celebrate Christ's death and resurrection.

See before that last triumphal entry and celebration of Jesus, we hear the command given by Jesus to his disciples to go and find a colt. Now that's not what I want you to ponder... after all they find the colt, and all is well. But what I do want to draw your attention to is the inquiry that the disciples receive from those bystanders witnessing this preparation take place. In a curious way they ask the two disciples retrieving the colt - what are you doing here. Now I know that Jesus predicted this would take place but what an interesting thing for a disciple of Christ to consider - especially as their lives and ministry are about to change forever.

What are you doing here?

For us here today this may seem like a rhetorical question - after all it's Sunday - it's Palm Sunday - it's the start of Holy Week - where else would we be? But I think at the heart of every disciples call to follow Jesus this question rings true - what are we doing here?

Now for the first disciples and apostles I have to believe this was not the first time that this question crossed their minds. From the banks of the Sea of Galilee and throughout their ministry together this question must have been a constant one that they wrestled with. When miracles were happening and 5000 people were being fed, and the lame were made to walk, and the blind were made to see, and the dead lived again - I am sure the answer to this question was a positive one - full of excitement, hope, and amazement. Yet when they were traversing the Samaritan countryside, at odd with the Jewish leadership, being threatened with stoning and death, hearing that their beloved teach and leader would be crucified - I am sure the answer to this question took on a different meaning - one of questioning, concern, and perhaps even frustration.

And in the same way what about for us sitting here today - I would imagine the same sentiments exist. When pondering the question, what are we doing here I am sure our answers vary depending on the day and the situations in life we find ourselves in. When life is going well, the stress is low, our families are happy, no one is sick - the answer to this question is a positive one,

full of faith and hope and joy – we are here to give thanks to God – we are here to worship our amazing Savior. Yet, when anxiety is on the rise, financial struggles ensue, there is fighting, sickness, hardship, and death – our answer shifts just a bit – where there was complete faith, now there is doubt and fear – where there was hope now, we find ourselves wondering, questioning and contemplating God’s presence.

This question of - what are we doing here – is the perfect question for us to ask ourselves and to ponder as we embark on these final days of our Lenten journey. For the last 40 odd days we have been in the wilderness. We have prayed, and abstained, and reflected, and repented and as I think is sometimes the goal of Lent we find ourselves hungry and thirsty for some good news. As Easter people we are ready to say that “A” word, we are ready to celebrate that empty tomb.

On this Palm Sunday we find ourselves on the cusp of the greatest yet most difficult three days this world has ever experienced. What started in celebration outside those city gates would seem to end in heartache and death just three days later. And that question that I’ve asked us to ponder this morning would be tested and tried and agonized over time and time again by the disciples who watched and witnessed this whole thing play out.

Yet the good news remains the same. The same God in Christ that sent those two disciples to retrieve that colt that morning, was the same Christ that entered the city gate, broke bread with his disciples, was arrested, tried, and crucified - and that same Christ - not to spoil the Easter surprise - will be the same God is a Christ that greets his disciples on the other side.

So why are we here - because we know this promise to be true. Amid the wilderness of life – amid the Lenten journey – amid the struggles, pains, tears, and fears - we need that reminder. We need that assurance. We need to hear once again that the same God that accompanies us when life is at its best is the same God that cries with us when life is at its worst. The same God that entered Jerusalem on a colt that day is the same resurrected God that meets each and every one of us in the garden that next morning. This is the truth that is revealed and promised yet again this Holy Week. This is what we will see as we gather on Maundy Thursday for the last supper and washing of the feet. This is what we will witness on Good Friday as even when Jesus is on the cross, he looks to God above and trusts in him. This is what we will celebrate when we gather here a week from today as we witness a tomb emptied and life restored for all God’s people.

What are we doing here?

We are walking with Christ.

Amen.

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It has been an honor and a privilege to serve these past two and half years with you. I pray that you always hold this message to be true - that in the good times and in the bad- God is with you. This is the truth we hold onto - this is the truth we live into. This is why we are here.

I give thanks for each and every one of you and pray God’s blessings upon you this day always.