

April 17, 2011
Matthew 21:1-11

Palm Sunday A
A Victory Parade

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Just this past Tuesday/Wednesday, we heard how the Lion Roars. The Lion being King of the Jungle— King of Israel's Jungle, King of our Jungle. Jesus is our King, a victorious king.

Just over two months ago the Green Bay Packers arrived back from Dallas, Texas as World Champions. Typically most Sports teams that win a major championship come home with such pomp and with fans lining the streets waiting to get a view of the Trophy and to congratulate the victors. Applause and cheers are heard throughout the streets. Perhaps confetti is being thrown, flags and banners fly. Everyone knows that this is a victory parade. Maybe we've seen other parades that have been similar— a war hero returns home and the streets are lined and the honor rides in the best car around. Today, most likely a limousine. Celebration is in the air.

You know things haven't changed much. Go back to Biblical Days. When a King conquered another nation or a general took down a city— he returned in celebration. Since paper wasn't available, confetti and streamers weren't thrown, they cut down palm branches and waved them— a symbol of victory. People would come out to the city to welcome home the victors. Shouts and cheers would go up around the city. The King— he would ride in triumphant on a mighty steed, a horse that stood tall and pranced around in pride. One look at this ancient celebration and you instantly knew celebration and victory was in the air.

Then Jesus— he rides into Jerusalem to begin the last week of his life. People are following him to the city. Jerusalem is packed, since this is the Passover time of the year. Many of those that came to the city to celebrate the Passover, they line the streets, grab palm branches and wave them and shower Jesus with praise. People are even chanting— Hosanna. Hosanna. One look at this celebration and you knew that victory was in the air.

Something was different though— A mighty king would ride into the city on a mighty steed— but Jesus, this king, rides in on a donkey. He's not in chariot— not on that horse that stands mighty and tall. Jesus— he shouldn't be receiving this type of fanfare. He hasn't won anything and he's riding a donkey— a donkey that has never been ridden on before. It's not very impressive at all.

Guess what Jesus didn't come to be an impressive earthly King. This donkey is key to what the victory was all about. In John's account of this day, He writes, *His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.* The disciples weren't paying attention to this donkey. It's the same that is true for us— we use Palm

branches or palm fronds, we shout Hosanna we carry the cross and lead in with a banner, it's a day of celebration but heaven forbid we bring a donkey into the church for a processional. We typically don't point out the donkey. The donkey points out the enemies Jesus came to defeat.

Who are these enemies? Well, back when Jesus rides into Jerusalem, the people thought it was the Romans who had conquered Israel and had soldiers covering the city. The Jews were hoping that Jesus would be their earthly king, that he would ride in on the mighty horse and bring Jerusalem and Israel back to the glory days of King David. They didn't want to be oppressed anymore. And it's true the Romans could be considered an enemy of Jesus. they nailed him to the cross.

But the list of enemies only begins. The greater enemy. his own people, the religious leaders, the chief priests, the Pharisees. Last week we heard how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. And this was only days before the victory celebration parade. No wonder so many were following Jesus into Jerusalem.

Behind the scenes the teachers of the law, the chief priests. they weren't happy at all. They gathered together the council and the heart of the discussion was something like this. "If we let him go on like this everyone will believe in him. The Romans will come and take away both our place and nation. The world is beginning to go after him."

The next step. to get Judas. one of the twelve to betray Jesus. They would arrest, raise false accusations, and condemn him to death. They would change the crowds cries from "HOSANNA" to "CRUCIFY HIM". The Romans would crucify him and hence Jesus' enemies are his own people.

We haven't gone far enough with his enemies. their not just his own people. actually their not just people in general. It's what driving the Pharisees and Chief Priests. Jealousy. the people are following Jesus instead of them. Hatred. Jesus is telling them to changed their lives and follow him. Fear---they may lose their positions. Greed. Jesus attacks their money making schemes. Anger. they don't like the fact that Jesus is being worshipped as God.

Doesn't that bring it a bit close to home. Jealousy, hatred, fear, greed, anger. that comes from all of us. It's SIN we suffer from it every day. It's in the world all around us and we too are infected by it. And Satan. he tempts everyone to give in to these ugly enemies of Jesus.

But we still haven't gone far enough. and to put it bluntly the last great enemy of Jesus is death. The punishment for greed, jealousy, hatred, fear, and anger and everything else that puts Jesus on the donkey.

Do you see who the real enemies of Jesus are? They aren't just Roman Soldiers or a few religious leaders. Jesus is going up against the very enemies that haunt us day in and day out. He is riding into Jerusalem to battle against the dark places in our hearts

and minds. He is taking on our worst enemies: sin, the wickedness that infests this world we live in, and Satan himself. And his ultimate war is against death itself. And he rides in to do battle on a donkey. This animal conveys peace not war, conveys humility and gentleness---not violence or bloodshed.

But a war is going on and Jesus he would rise right into the worst of what his enemies our enemies would do to him. He didn't resort to shooting off missiles or blowing up buildings in fact the Romans beat him. He was whipped within an inch of his life. Blood was shed. Not the blood of his enemies but his own blood. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, humble and gentle, seeking to bring peace. For he was the prince of peace. And his enemies and our enemies attacked him.

As I was searching about the donkey this last week, I came across a Christmas Ornament from Bronners Christmas store in Frankenmuth, MI. And I found a legend about the donkey:

Legend tells us the donkey that carried Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday followed Him to Calvary. Appalled by the sight of Jesus on the cross, the donkey turned away but could not leave. It is said that the shadow of the cross fell upon the shoulders and back of the donkey. A cross marking found on many donkeys today remains a testimony of the love and devotion of a humble, little donkey.

Actually, in my mind the cross marking on the donkey reminds us of the love and devotion of Jesus. Jesus rode into Jerusalem for one reason and one reason only and that was to make the victory parade come true. He was riding into Jerusalem to become our Prince of Peace. He rode into Jerusalem to show how he would defeat our enemies.

And how did Jesus win the victory? Well my dear family of God He let those enemies do their worst. He did not stop the violence done to him. He willingly went to the cross. All of our greed, hatred, fear, jealousy, anger, sin, evil, and death surrounded him. Darkness covered the earth and when that happened It appeared that those enemies had won. It looked like the man that rode into Jerusalem on a donkey was defeated. Why would a king ride on a donkey and choose to die. He was beaten, broken, battered, blooded, and buried. Satan and all the powers of evil they had to be cheering. They thought they won.

We know better we know the rest of the story. We know of a morning that shattered the darkest places of sin and evil. We know of a stone that was rolled away and the hatred, jealousy, fear, anger, and greed had been overcome by the prince of peace. And we know of a Savior who rises from the dead to defeat death once and for all.

And according to John the disciples understood. Jesus' victory was bigger than pushing back a few Romans or greedy, jealous religious leaders. His victory was over everything sin and death could do to us. And it came by riding into town on a donkey. It came by way of a cross and by his victorious resurrection from the dead.

And the victory parade it keeps on going. Every hymn of praise, every hosanna we sing is added to the victory parade. Every prayer adds to the celebration. Every day we follow and obey our Lord we add to the line following Jesus on that first Palm Sunday. Today once again we join in the victory parade. Not only the victory parade that led him to the cross but the victory celebration that comes when OUR KING wins the greatest victory the reason churches are packed next Sunday. And I hope and pray that our church is packed for a victory celebration next Sunday as it was in Lambeau Field days after the Packers won the Super Bowl. Praise God for this week that we have begun. Praise God for the first Holy Week of our Lord. Praise God that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and not on a mighty horse. Amen.

Now may the pace of God which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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