

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Luke 19:29-38

²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, "The Lord needs it." So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying,

*"Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"*

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!*

*Let Israel say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."*

*Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.*

*This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.*

*I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.*

*The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.*

*This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.*

*This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!

O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

*The Lord is God,
and he has given us light.*

*Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.*

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;

*you are my God, I will extol you.
O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

Isn't this great!! Reading the story of Jesus' entry into the city of Jerusalem makes us feel good! Everybody appeared to be on board! Jesus is King! The whole city of Jerusalem seemed to be in party mode. "Hosanna! Jesus, save us! Messiah, save us!" the crowds shouted. Wow! Isn't it great!

It was reminiscent of the beautiful words written by the Psalmist in Psalm 118. In fact, there seem to be quotes from that psalm. Maybe the people were reconnecting with those words because of their hope in what they wanted Jesus to do for them. The psalm praises and glorifies God.

The sentiment expressed gratitude for all that God had done for them, yet recognizing that they would always need God. God was their ruler, their King; and nothing could replace God. One gets the feeling that the intention of one singing the psalm was that he or she would never have any other God.

I want to share this short story with you to set the stage for today's reflection on the Palm Sunday story. The construction of the Golden Gate Bridge was so risky that newspaper reporters dubbed it "Dance of Danger." Workers on top of swaying catwalks and high towers, sometimes hundreds of feet in the air, would be blown by powerful winds. Predictions were that for every \$1 million spent, one life would be lost.

Engineers on the Golden Gate Bridge, however, believed the risks could be lowered. When construction began in 1932, numerous safety measures were put in place and strictly enforced: mandatory use of hard hats and prescription filtered eyeglasses, implementation of a no showboating policy (cause for automatic firing), use of tie-off lines, and establishment of an onsite hospital greatly reduced the casualty rate. After nearly four years of construction and \$20 million spent, only one worker had died.

The most effective safety device, without question, was the use of a trapeze net. This large net, costing \$130,000, was draped sixty feet below the roadbed under construction, extending ten feet to either side. This net caught so many falling workers that the newspapers began running box scores on the total number of lives saved. Workers saved by the net were said to have joined the "Halfway to Hell Club."

Beyond that, the net freed many of the workers from an often-paralyzing sense of fear, which helped them work more productively. (Robert Lewis with Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence*, Zondervan, 2000)

We have Jesus as a safety net, and more. With that in mind, we turn our attention now to The Palm Sunday story. This story is recorded in all four Gospels, each with their own variations. Palm Sunday was a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9 written nearly 550 years earlier.

There it is written, "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*"

In the story, we are told that the children of God had gathered for the Passover in the holy city of Jerusalem. Prior to Jesus' entry into the city, we know Jesus had done a lot of teaching and performed numerous amazing miracles, including the raising of Lazarus from the dead, which he did just prior to entering Jerusalem. The Jews came to the streets to see Jesus and to

welcome and honor him as their King—their Holy Messiah. Some of them probably actually witnessed Jesus perform miracles and teach in the temple; others surely heard the amazing stories.

They shouted, "Hosanna!" which means, save us! "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna!" they cried. It was foretold to them that a Messiah would one day come to set them free. They believed their mighty king, the promised messiah, would come as a mighty warrior and free them from oppression. In those moments, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, they were convinced that Jesus was the one they had been awaiting. We know, however, that their minds were changed over the course of that week.

The disciples, like everyone else, lined the streets and got caught up in the excitement. Unfortunately, most, if not all, of the disciples had the same ideas of what the promised messiah would do when he came. They believed Jesus was the promised one, and this grand entrance that the people showered on Jesus, surely was a sign of the turning point, and now finally, Jesus would rise to power and claim the throne and save God's chosen people.

They were correct about the events signaling a turning point. They were right about Jesus' rise to power. But like the rest of the crowd, they did not fully understand the true mission Jesus came to fulfill. They did not understand that he came to set their spirits free from sin, and to open the door to God's holy presence. Imagine the disciples' disappointment and shock at the end of the week when the crowds turned against Jesus, put him on trial, and shortly thereafter nailed him to a cross. Remember, most of the disciples ran and hid when that time came because they were afraid. Peter even denied having any association with Jesus.

Indeed, Jesus is a king, but Jesus did not let all the grandiose admiration go to his head. Thank goodness Jesus could not be swayed by cries of the crowd to become who they wanted him to be. He knew God's plan which, as God's Son, he came to fulfill.

Jesus was making a statement about himself when he rode into town on a donkey. Jesus knew exactly who he was. He knew he was the Messiah—the one foretold of by the prophets Isaiah and Zechariah. He was a king who ruled with humility, meekness and peace. Not only did our King Jesus know precisely who he was then and what his mission was when he entered Jerusalem, he knows who he is and what his mission is now as he enters the Jerusalem of each of our lives. Embodied in his presence that day and today is a transparent honesty which defies so much of the worldly leadership today.

Our King comes with compassion for souls and bodies. During Jesus' ministry on earth, he healed lepers and made the blind see and the lame walk. He met and talked with people no one else would talk to because they were different or considered unclean. He helped wrong doers to see God and change their lives.

Jesus cared for people so much that he cried for the people of Jerusalem saying, "*O Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing*" (Matthew 23:37) I can't imagine how many tears he must be shedding now, as he looks down on the world lost in sin today.

Unlike world-leader models before us and kings who focus more on themselves and what people think of them to determine their decisions on how to rule over others, Jesus wants nothing more than to enter our lives and make us whole. He wants to walk with us. He wants to help us connect our spiritual selves with the living of our days. He wants to heal us where there is brokenness in our lives. He wants to cleanse us and free us from our sin, and transform us into willing disciples.

Here then is the questions before each of us as we reflect on this joyous day, Palm Sunday. Is Jesus your king? Or are you serving another king? Who or what is king and ruling your heart?

In a sermon, John Ortberg compares allowing Jesus' rule in your heart to driving a car:

When it was time to take our first child home from the hospital, we put her in the car seat in the back of the car, and then I got in the front seat to drive. She was so small even the baby seat was way too big. She looked so fragile to me that I drove home on the freeway going 35 miles per hour with the hazard lights flashing the whole time.

That first day, when your kid is in the car with you, is a scary day. Does anybody want to know what the next scary day is with your kid in the car? It's when they turn 16, and now you're handing over the keys. Now they're moving from the passenger seat, from the ride-along seat, into the driver's seat. That's a scary moment.

It is a big moment in your life when you hand someone else the keys. Up until now, I've been driving. I choose the destination. I choose the route. I choose the speed. You're in the drive-along seat. But if we are to change seats, if you're going to drive, I have to trust you. It's all about control. Whoever is in this seat is the person in control.

A lot of people find Jesus handy to have in the car as long as he's in the ride-along seat, because something may come up where they require his services. Jesus, I have a health problem, and I need some help, . I want you in the car, but I'm not so sure I want you driving. If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my life anymore. If he's driving, I'm not in charge of my wallet anymore. If I put him in control then it's no longer a matter of giving some money now and then when I'm feeling generous or when more of it is coming into my life. Now, it's his wallet. It's scary. If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my ego anymore. I no longer have the right to satisfy every self-centered ambition. No, it's his agenda. It's his life. Now, I'm not in charge of my mouth anymore. I don't get to gossip, flatter, cajole, deceive, rage, intimidate, manipulate, exaggerate. I get out of the driver's seat and hand the keys over to him. I'm fully engaged. In fact, I'm more alive than I've ever been before, but it's not my life anymore. It's his life.

Our King is coming! Our King rides towards us and looks into our eyes. We shout "Hosanna, save us" as he approaches. Are we serious about this? Do we really want King Jesus to rule in our lives? Do we want our king our way, or do we want our King God's way? Some will hear these questions and squirm in their seats. Others will hear these questions and confess their ongoing or their renewed need for Jesus' rule in their heart. They will recognize that being faithful is an ongoing challenge, and welcome their King's help to remain faithful and true. Their shouts of "Hosanna!" are joyous, because they know they are loved by God, who sent His Son to be their Savior, friend, ally, comforter, and guide. They know King Jesus. Where are you in the crowd?

Isn't today great! It's awesome! Everyone seems to be on board! But the tides change throughout the week. Jesus is going to disappoint the people. He's going to overturn the money changers tables and release the animals at the temple. He's not going to be the king they wanted him to be; he's much, much better than that. Amen.