

Blessed is He Who Comes

Mark 11:1-11

A young guy called up his mom from college and asked her for some money, because he was broke. His mother said, *“Sure, sweetie. I’ll send you some money. You also left your calculus book here when you visited 2 weeks ago. Do you want me to send that along too?”* *“Uhh, yeah sure, OK,”* he replied. So his mom wrapped the book along with some money, kissed her husband goodbye, and went to the post office to mail the money and the book. When she got back, the father asked, *“Well how much did you give the boy this time?”* *“Oh, I wrote two checks out to him — one for \$20 and the other for \$1,000.”* *“A thousand dollars,”* screamed her husband! *“Are you crazy?”* *“Don’t worry honey,”* she replied. *“I taped the \$20 check to the cover of his book, but I put the \$1,000 one somewhere between the pages in chapter 19!”*

That’s what you might call a blessing in disguise. The boy wasn’t going to get the blessing of the money unless he looked for it. And he wouldn’t look for it unless he opened the book and studied it. That’s kind of like the situation we find in our Gospel lesson for this morning – the story of Jesus’ triumphal procession into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. You might say that He was a blessing in disguise. In fact, He was the Blessed One, the Messiah, our Savior, disguised as a humble

king. And He came to bring us the greatest blessings of all – forgiveness, life and salvation. But the only way we can receive those blessings is through faith in His Holy Word – as the Holy Spirit enables us to open up the Book and believe the Gospel!

You see, it is only in God’s Word that the truth is revealed – the blessed truth that Jesus is our Savior. And believe it or not, that’s why He came riding into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey – to prove that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. It was to fulfill the prophecy spoken of in our Old Testament lesson for today, Zechariah 9:9, “BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU; RIGHTEOUS AND HAVING SALVATION IS HE, HUMBLE AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A DONKEY.” By riding into Jerusalem that way, Jesus was publicly proclaiming that He had come to bring the blessing of salvation to His people, by covering up their guilt with His righteousness and redeeming them from their sins.

What a blessed promise, and just what we so desperately need – salvation from our sins. Unfortunately, the Rabbis of Jesus’ day misunderstood that. You see, they had a hard time explaining how the Messiah, whom they saw as the Conquering Political King, would be content with the humble entry prescribed in Zechariah 9:9. So, this was their explanation: *“Scripture says the Son of Man comes ‘on the clouds of heaven,’*

and 'lowly and riding on a donkey.' If Israel is worthy, then He will come 'with the clouds of heaven.' But if they are not worthy, then He will come 'lowly and riding on a donkey.'"

Was Jesus' entry into Jerusalem a declaration of Israel's unworthiness? Was it a declaration of our own unworthiness? Certainly our sins of thought, word and deed do make us unworthy in God's sight. Our sins of omission and commission, doing the things we shouldn't do and leaving undone the things we should do, are an unsightly blemish to God. When we bicker with one another; when we let Satan have a foothold and destroy our peace and joy in Christ; when we fail to open up the Book and study God's Word or apathetically sit by instead of getting involved in the work of our congregation, we are giving into the curse of sin instead of receiving the blessing of God. And Scripture tells us that the ultimate curse of sin is life without God, eternal separation and condemnation in hell.

My friends, that's why we so desperately need the salvation and righteousness that only Jesus can bring. And that's why He came riding into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. It was the beginning of His ride to cross, where He hung on the cursed tree to blot out the curse of our sins forever and bring us the blessing of His pardon and forgiveness. It is said that, the Lamb for Passover was usually selected on that first day of Passover

week. And so Jesus came publicly to Jerusalem on that first day of Passover week, to offer Himself as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

For you see, His riding into Jerusalem on that donkey was the fulfillment of another prophecy spoken of long ago; namely, the blessing that Jacob gave to his son Judah, the clan from which the Messiah, the Savior would come. It's recorded in Genesis 49:10-11: **“THE SCEPTER WILL NOT DEPART FROM JUDAH, NOR THE RULER’S STAFF FROM BETWEEN HIS FEET, UNTIL HE COMES TO WHOM IT BELONGS, AND THE OBEDIENCE OF THE NATIONS IS HIS. HE WILL TETHER HIS DONKEY TO A VINE, HIS COLT TO THE CHOICEST BRANCH; HE WILL WASH HIS GARMENTS IN WINE, HIS ROBES IN THE BLOOD OF GRAPES!”**

Jesus fulfilled that prophecy, when He came riding into Jerusalem on the colt, the foal of a donkey. But the ‘wine’ and the ‘blood of grapes’ spoken of in that prophecy, suggest the imminent outpouring of His blood on the cross, which cleanses us from all unrighteousness and makes our garments as white as snow. Best of all, when we feast on the bread and wine in the sacrament, He gives us His very own body and blood sacrificed on the cross, for the complete remission and wiping out of all our sins. And that is His blessing of salvation to you and me.

This reflected so beautifully in our text, by the crowds that cried out: **“HOSANNA! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD! BLESSED IS THE COMING KINGDOM OF OUR FATHER DAVID! HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!”** As you may know, *Hoshiannah* is a Hebrew word that means: ‘Save us, we beseech you.’ It was typically used in the Old Testament, when a humble subject would make supplication to the king, begging him for his help, either for food or for protection. In our text, it is our supplication to Jesus, the Messianic king, to protect us from our enemies, Satan and hell, by saving us from our sins, and nourishing us with the food of forgiveness.

Unfortunately, like the Rabbis, the crowds in Jerusalem also misunderstood that. Oh, they believed that Jesus was the Messiah. But sadly, they were looking for an earthly king. You see, Passover crowds tended to be expectant during the season that celebrated Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, hoping for a worldly monarch to rescue them and establish a temporal empire. In fact, some 150 years earlier Simon Maccabaeus had similarly entered Jerusalem with palm branches and shouts of thanksgiving, after he had blasted Israel’s enemies in battle. So the crowds on Palm Sunday were looking for a military redeemer. But Jesus came to usher in the real deliverance from our bondage to sin. He came to blast to pieces our true enemies –

sin and Satan – and establish His eternal empire that will reign over death and hell forever.

In that respect, Jesus' Palm Sunday entrance was actually not triumphant. After all, Jesus was not seated on a white charger, brandishing war trophies, with a train of captives in His wake. Quite the opposite – in a few short days, the Roman soldiers would lead Him out of the city as a seemingly defeated captive, the king crowned not with a crown of gold, but a crown of thorns, enthroned not in a gleaming palace but on a rugged cross, hailed as the King of fools. But in so doing, He defeated the real fool, the devil, and set us captives free. Best of all, He will come again someday for the true Triumphal entry into the Heavenly city of the New Jerusalem.

Perhaps, that's why Jesus entered Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, on the East – as a foreshadowing of His return to earth at the second coming. Scripture says that He will come from the rising of the sun, to take us to Himself. Just as the father came running to embrace the prodigal son, Jesus will come running back to earth, to bring us into our rightful Home in Heaven.

Dear friends, shouldn't we respond then, with the same kind of joyful praise, as the crowds in our text? After all, we know

that Jesus was not a political king, but better yet, our Saving King, who rescued us from sin, death and hell. And so, we have much more to rejoice about. That's why, we can spread our branches at His feet. Curiously, St. Mark uses a different word there than the other Evangelists. It refers to: 'a mass of straw, rushes or leaves, beaten together or strewn loosely to form a bed or a carpeted way.' To put it simply, our acts of service for Jesus ought to form a red carpet for Him to ride upon, as we lay down our lives before Him in humble adoration and praise.

Or to put it another way, we can take our cue from the guy in our text with the donkey. When he was asked to serve, He gave gladly, willingly and without complaint. Well, we too have a donkey – something in our lives, which we can give back to God for the work of His kingdom. Maybe you can sing or program a computer; you can teach or give a hug to a hurting friend; you can write, or do mechanical work, or simply make out a check – but whatever it is, that is your donkey. And your donkey belongs to Jesus. As our text says: **“THE LORD HAS NEED OF IT!”** Or literally: **“THE OWNER NEEDS IT.”** In other words, the real Owner of all we have and are is Jesus Christ our Savior. And the way we thank Him for the blessing our salvation, is by using our time, talents and treasures for His kingdom!

Back on February 3, 1943 at 1:15 a.m., the troop transport ‘Dorchester’ was torpedoed and sunk in the cold North Atlantic waters off Greenland. The ship was only 90 miles from its destination, but within twenty-seven minutes 678 of the 904 men on board were ‘lost in the ice-berg waters of the North Atlantic.’ Among these 678 dead were four chaplains – John Washington, Alex Goode, George Fox, and Clark Poling. These four men went down with their ship because they had given their life jackets to soldiers who had none. And with utter disregard for self, the chaplains stood hand in hand, praying to God for the safety of those men who were leaving the sinking ship.

That true story is entitled: *“Whose life-jacket are you and I wearing?”* And the events of Palm Sunday tell us that we are wearing the Life-Jacket that belonged to Jesus Christ. He freely gave up His life for you and me, when He rode into Jerusalem, and rode all the way to the cross, to save us from our sins. He gave us the Life-Jacket of His atoning death, to rescue us from sinking down and drowning in the depths of our guilt and despair. Out of thanks for all of that, may God empower and equip us by His Spirit, to boldly praise His name and proclaim Him as the Blessed One, until He comes again in glory! In His name we pray, Amen.