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John 12:11-19
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Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

In the 1960's the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, was profoundly impacted by Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent peaceful resistance in India as a way to gain independence from British rule. King saw it as a path to overcome the horrors of racial segregation in our country. Gandhi believed that this was the only moral and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. And so in that spirit, Dr. King, through the American Civil Rights Movement, organized peaceful protests like bus boycotts and diner sit-ins to fight the social norms of prejudice in America.

Dr. King's notion of nonviolence had six key principles:

One can resist evil without resorting to violence.

Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.

Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not the person.

Nonviolence is a way of life.

Nonviolence is not a passive force.

Nonviolence is applicable to all situations.

Dr. King even called these principles the "guiding light of our moment. Christ furnished the spirit and motivation while Gandhi furnished the method."

No where is this more evident than in our Scripture today as Jesus peacefully and nonviolently rode into Jerusalem one last time before Passover and just before being crucified by the Jewish authorities. Each of the four gospels have this story in them but with their own distinctions.

Please join me as we read from John 12:12-19 and we see this for ourselves.

12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. **13** They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed is the king of Israel!"

14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

15 "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;
see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

17 Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. **18** Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him.

19 So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

This morning as we dive into this text, we will look at several Old Testament prophecies that foretold the Messiah’s coming. We will consider both Jesus’ humility and divinity as signs of the Messiah. We will see how differently Jesus returns at the end of times in the Book of Revelation. And finally, we’ll consider what God is saying to us today?

Scholars estimate that Jesus fulfilled over three hundred prophecies that pointed to him as the Messiah, Anointed One, or Christ for whom the Jewish people had waited. The Old Testament contains more than 574 scriptures that described the Messiah’s coming.

For example, the time of His birth was predicted in Daniel 8 & 9. He would be born in Bethlehem as predicted in Micah.¹ He would be born of a virgin noted in Isaiah.² He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver as told in Zechariah.³ He would be mocked and pierced in Psalm 22.⁴ And he would die with the wicked, but be buried with the rich again from Isaiah.⁵

Furthermore, the Messiah would heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, and perform many miracles. All of the Gospel’s confirm these signs as being indicative of Jesus’ life and ministry.

But the words of the prophet Zechariah from the sixth century B.C., more than five hundred years before Jesus’ time, spoke loudly about that particular day in Jerusalem. Zechariah said,

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation,

¹ Micah 5:2

² Isaiah 7:14

³ Zechariah 11:12

⁴ Psalm 22:7-8, 16

⁵ Isaiah 53:9

gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.”⁶ Essentially over the entire world!

In Jewish literature and teaching, the image of a king on a donkey approaching Jerusalem was consistently understood to signify the arrival of the Messianic King.

1 Kings tells the story of when King David set his son, Solomon, as ruler over Israel and Judah in his place. He had him ride into Jerusalem on his own donkey.⁷ A donkey was a lowly, humble animal, a symbol of humility and peace, as well as a princely mount. This was in contrast to the war-horses used by the Roman Empire.

Matthew said, the people spread their cloaks on the road as an act of royal homage.

John said, they picked up and waived palm branches as symbols of goodness and victory, joy and celebration. Palm branches were often depicted on coins and important buildings. Solomon had palm branches carved into the walls and doors of the temple. Again at the end of the Bible in the Book of Revelation, people from every nation raise palm branches to honor the Lamb that was slain, King Jesus.⁸

It was beginning of Passover. Crowds of people were coming in from all over and going to the temple for celebration and festivities. The population of Jerusalem would have increased from about fifty thousand to several hundred thousand. The mood was hyped. People were dancing, and singing, and rejoicing. The Passover known as Pesche, was a major festival celebrating the Israelites’ liberation from slavery in Egypt. It was marked by a weeklong observance including a special meal called a Seder, the removal of leavened foods, and the retelling of the Exodus story.

Everything that day pointed to the fact that the people were ready for their Messiah...and Jesus was their man. They lined the streets as Jesus entered into town. They waved palm branches. And they shouted, “Hosanna!” And “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel.”

“Hosanna” was a prayer that meant, “Save us, we pray.”

⁶ Zechariah 9:9, 10b

⁷ 1 Kings 1:33

⁸ Revelation 7:9-10

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Both of these sayings come directly from Psalm 118:25-29.

“O LORD, save us; O LORD grant us success.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you.
The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us.
[Listen to this] We boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the
horns of the altar.
You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt
you.
Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

What does this sound like? Our Palm Sunday text! Psalm 118 must have been a song of praise that worshippers would have sung as they arrived in Jerusalem and ascended the temple mount for the Passover celebration. The boughs in hand were branches used to create little huts for the Feast of Tabernacles to help them remember their time of wandering in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. The horns of the altar were projections from the corners of the altar where the sacrifice lamb was bound. This was part of their Passover tradition.

Now let's fast forward to the end of the New Testament and the Book of Revelation. In John's apocalyptic vision, when Jesus returns to usher in the new Jerusalem, it will not be on a donkey but this time on a white war-horse stallion. Listen to this...

John wrote, “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. That's King Jesus With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but himself. He is dressed in a robe dripping in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is Jesus our Messiah. THIS was who Jerusalem hoped for back on that Psalm Sunday.

So what is the difference between the two.

In this in-between time from Jesus' resurrection and his triumphal return at the end of the age, we, who are called by Jesus' name, are to usher in his kingdom reign, not through power and might, but by humility, peace, and love. The Apostle Paul warns us clearly, "Our battle is not against [people], but against rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."⁹ The only way we engage this battle in the meantime is through persistent prayer, unwavering faith, and constant devotion to Jesus Christ. That is our witness.

This is why through the Lord's prayer, we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven."

We trust in Jesus Christ to sort things out at the end. He will hold evil accountable. He will destroy Satan and his kingdom once and for all. And He will restore this world to the way it was before the fall of humankind.

That is Good News.

So what then is God calling us to do today on this Palm Sunday?

I believe as followers of Jesus Christ, we have some work to do.

I believe God is raising us up to take stands against rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil among us.

I believe God is calling us to pray without ceasing since the battle belongs to the Lord and not to us.¹⁰

I believe God is calling us to protest, albeit, nonviolently and peacefully, against policies and leaders that do not align with our Christian values.

I believe God is calling us to be a counter cultural witness of Jesus Christ to a world that has forgotten, or misconstrued what it means to be a Christian.

I believe God wants us to know that Jesus does not save by sword or spear.¹¹

I believe God is calling us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to care for the orphan, widow, vulnerable, and aliens within our midst.

I believe God is calling us to extend radical hospitality to our neighbors and people who are different than us.

I believe God is calling us to shower those who disagree with love, respect, and kindness, knowing that they might call us names. They might spit upon us. They might persecute us, say all kinds of evil things about us. That's ok. Jesus told us to expect it.

⁹ Ephesians 6:12

¹⁰ 2 Chronicles 20:17

¹¹ 1 Samuel 17:47

And I believe that God is calling us to never ever forget who we are and whose we are. We belong to the Lord. Our citizenship is in heaven, not on earth.

Luke concludes his telling of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem with this very sad commentary.

"As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known this day what would bring you peace - but now is hidden from your eyes.'"¹²

What, my friends, Jesus would say us if he rode like this into America today? What or who are we seeking that we hope will save us? Only He can bring peace to our hearts, to our families, to our community, to our country, and to our world.

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

Save us. O Lord grant us success.

Come quickly, Jesus! We pray. Amen.

¹² Luke 19:41