Palm Sunday Sermon

Luke 19:28-40

*Jesus is Lord whether we are faithful or faithless*

When I was in the holy land a few years ago one of the places I found most meaningful was the Palm Sunday road that Jesus would have traveled. I had always imagined the road was flat and straight, but in fact it is winding, and it begins at the top of a valley, goes down into the valley, and then up the other side of the valley into Jerusalem.

What struck me most about this discovery was that it made me realize how you could see Jesus and the cheering disciples coming from far off. There was no way you would miss a large crowd beginning high up on the side of the valley coming down and then up into the city. So, then there is little wonder that some of the Pharisees and religious elites would be concerned by this.

Our gospel this morning is Luke’s version of Palm Sunday and Jesus entry into Jerusalem. It begins with Jesus sending two unnamed disciples to fetch a colt, or young donkey, for him to ride on. When questioned by the colt’s owner they give the response Jesus has told them which is, “The Lord needs it.”

Jesus then rides the colt into the city while his disciples cheer, shout and give praise for the deeds of power that Jesus has done, crying out, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Finally, some of the Pharisees who have been watching this take place say to Jesus, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop." Jesus responds by saying, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

We are never told why the Pharisees are particularly upset at the disciples cheering and Jesus entry, but we can make some educated guesses. Jesus has come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. This is the biggest holy time of the year for the Jewish people. The city would be swelling to bursting point with merchants, travelers, and Roman soldiers.

Perhaps the Pharisees were concerned that the commotion might anger and provoke the Roman soldiers into violence. Perhaps they are concerned about the Messianic overtones that Jesus entry implies. Afterall the Pharisees have their expectations on what the Messiah will be like, and what he will come to do, and Jesus does not fit that description.

Maybe it’s a combination of several reasons. What we do know is that Jesus does not silence his disciples, and he further states that even if no one had been there to welcome him into the city that nature itself would cry out in joy for Jesus. Creation itself knows who Jesus really is and recognizes him, and for once Jesus disciples get things right by recognizing him too, and they cheerfully celebrate and welcome him into Jerusalem as the Messiah.

However, the city that Jesus so longs to be in and restore does not recognize or welcome him. The citizens of Jerusalem don’t recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah, and some members of the city even demand he shut his disciples up. In just a few days Jesus will receive a very different reception in Jerusalem.

Those disciples that cheered Jesus into the city will abandon him to hide when he is arrested. St. Peter, one of the most trusted disciples, will even deny that he knows Jesus. Those who want to shut Jesus up will go so far as to have him illegally arrested, tried, and executed.

Palm Sunday is a day to remember how the disciples got it right and celebrated Jesus as the promised King and Messiah, but also to remember that they will also get it wrong and abandon him to save their own lives. Most importantly though it is a day to remember that whether Jesus disciples get things wrong or right, and whether the world wants to celebrate or hate Jesus that he still goes on to the cross, and that Jesus is still Lord.

Today Jesus disciples are a lot like those original disciples who welcomed him into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Many of us seek to follow Jesus and his calling to love and serve others, and trust in God. Many of us attend worship regularly and meet the risen Christ in the sacraments, because we want to grow closer to Jesus. Many of us would love the chance to welcome Jesus in person to our homes, congregation, and town. But we also must admit that we are human and at times we don’t get it right. We don’t trust Jesus, we don’t welcome his message, and we don’t want to follow him.

At times it can be hard to trust Jesus when we can’t see where he is leading us. Our world is not a peaceful perfect place. When bad things happen, we can struggle to trust that Jesus is Lord and that he is with us during suffering. When the Holy Spirit calls us to follow Jesus, we can resist that message if it means having to make difficult decisions or changes even if it is for the sake of the gospel message.

When the Holy Spirit calls us to follow Jesus even if it means discomfort, trouble, suffering, or stepping out of our comfort zone we can refuse to follow Jesus and wish that he would simply keep things the way we want and like it. Yet even if we are unfaithful at times to Jesus, he is always faithful to us.

Even if we were to completely abandon Jesus and ignore his calling to us through the Holy Spirit, Jesus would never abandon us. Even knowing that his disciples would be faithless and abandon him just a few days after welcoming him into Jerusalem as the Messiah, Jesus still went to Jerusalem and the cross for them.

Even knowing that Peter would deny him, his apostles abandon him, and the city of Jerusalem condemn him, Jesus still went to the city and to the cross for all. This is because whether we are faithful to him or faithless to him Jesus is still Lord and he will never abandon the world he loves so much.

Today we celebrate a day that the disciples got it right by welcoming and being faithful to Jesus and trusting him. We also must remember though that soon they will be faithless to him, but the good news is that Jesus still goes to the cross for them. We also must remember that even when we make mistakes, even when we or our world is faithless to Jesus that he will never be faithless to us.

Instead he still went to the cross to die for us and our world, and he continues to give himself to us in the gift of water at Holy Baptism, and at Holy Communion where in bread and wine we receive his very body and blood.

Jesus is Lord whether we are faithful or faithless. Jesus is Lord whether we make mistakes or get things right. Jesus is Lord and he will never abandon or forsake us but will continue to be with us and be faithful to us. Amen.