

“Palm Sunday”

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## Opening Prayer

Good morning folks, I hope and pray that you are doing well. It has been another tough week, especially for a few of you. I've been in prayer, as have your churches, over you constantly. Beloved, whether this time is only slightly annoying to you because you are home all the time or absolutely devastating, do know that you have a church family who cares. Don't hesitate to call upon us for anything that you might need. We are here with you in all of this. It has been the most interesting Lenten season of my life, and maybe also yours. The good news is that Jesus is still in control. Currently we have been working our way through the Gospel of John, and today we continue by talking about the beginning of Holy Week. Today we start by talking about the beginning of the end of Jesus's life.

The scripture we read for today picks up where we left off on Wednesday. On Wednesday we read about the resurrection of Lazarus, which took place just outside Jerusalem. Following Lazarus's rise from the dead, many people begin to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and His fame spread throughout the area. The religious leaders who hate Jesus, from that point forward, really want to see Jesus put to death. They think that He is blaspheming the Lord, they think that He is demon possessed, and they recognize that Jesus teaches against them. What is more many of the religious leaders think that Jesus, by claiming to be God, will bring the Roman authorities down on them. In the eyes of the Pharisees they are doing the world a favor by ridding it of Jesus. There is no longer any question in their minds if they will kill Jesus, it is a matter of when. The crowds of people that think Jesus might be the Messiah are the limiting factor for the Pharisees. As we read this morning throngs of people now believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and the Pharisees and religious teachers want to avoid a major riot if they can. So what they will do is quite clever... they will wait until Jesus is alone to strike. In the meantime, Jesus, who now only has five days to live, is hailed as king.

In John 12:12-13 we read “On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.’” The reason we wave around palm branches and call this Sunday before Easter Palm Sunday is because that is exactly what the crowds do for Jesus as He enters Jerusalem for the last time. We should remember that although the people here are calling Jesus king and are rightfully treating Him as such, that in five days the people of Jerusalem will call for Jesus's death. Palm Sunday, Beloved Congregation, is only joyful on its face. The truth is that this is a tragic time in Jesus's life. From here the Messiah will go and teach for a few days, have the Last Supper with His disciples, and then will be crucified for the sins of humanity.

Good Friday is not far away. With that being said, it is definitely appropriate that we wave palm branches and shout Hosanna on Palm Sunday, because Jesus is most certainly King.

The act of cutting down palm branches (or for some laying down their coats) in front of Jesus is reminiscent of a victorious king returning from battle. If the king triumphantly conquered his enemies, he would return home to a victorious parade. Think Napoleon walking through the Arc de Triumph after winning a battle, or returning GI's from WWII. In the olden days it was the same, and for the people to celebrate Jesus as King was very appropriate. Many had seen and heard about the miracles He had performed, they assumed He was coming to push out the Romans and reestablish the Israelites to glory. Of course this wasn't Jesus's plan, but He is definitely still the King. Jesus's plan was not to establish an earthly kingdom, but rather a heavenly one. Jesus came not to push out the Romans and conquer them... but rather to conquer sin and death. That He does on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, which establishes for us eternity if we call upon Him. That is worth celebrating, and it marks for us the King of kings and the Lord of lords, God in human flesh, Jesus the Messiah. But the people who are celebrating Jesus then don't know it like that, although there are hints that Jesus is more than an earthly king.

As we read about in both pieces of scripture today, Jesus doesn't ride in on a horse or camel like a normal king would. Instead, the God of all things in heaven and on earth in human flesh, rides in on a lowly colt. A young donkey. John 12:14-15 reads "Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, 'fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.'" That, Beloved Congregation, is a direct quote from the book of Zechariah 9:9. It is a Messianic prophecy, that the Savior would parade into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. But what does Jesus being seated on a donkey mean? It shows the ultimate humility. Jesus has a habit of turning the world on its head. How fitting that the Lord of Creation doesn't play by our rules (thank Him for that!) and doesn't do as we expect. A donkey is not an appropriate method of transportation for a warring king. The donkey is a beast of burden, and also a beast of peace. Jesus on the donkey embodies the title that we often give Him: "Prince of Peace."

As all of this is going on, the Pharisees who hate Jesus are growing all the more angry. Jesus has already been a thorn in their side, but now the people of Jerusalem are proclaiming "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Hosanna is an expression of praise and joy.) In Luke 19:39 the Pharisees try to calm this crowd by saying to Jesus "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." Note that they think all of these shouts of praise will bring the Romans down on them, and they dispute every one of Jesus's claims. Jesus's response is a famous one: "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!" The Pharisees final response is one of disgust. In John 12:19 we read "So the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him.'" Indeed for that moment on Palm Sunday the city of Jerusalem accurately (if unknowingly) acknowledges their King. But we all know,

Beloved Congregation, that the shouts of praise on Palm Sunday will turn to cries for crucifixion on Good Friday.

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week for us as Christians. On Thursday we will remember the Last Supper, on Friday we will remember the crucifixion, and a week from today we will remember the greatest thing that has ever happened in human history with Jesus's resurrection. Beloved, perhaps more than any time before in our lives, this has been a somber Lenten season. The forty days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday are always supposed to be a little more serious, but with the events of the world taking place it has been easier to be serious. Many of us often give up things for Lent, chocolate or Facebook or meat or something else. This year all of us have forcibly given up our normal schedules. If you haven't up until now, I would encourage you to take time during Holy Week to really delve into your faith. You will likely never have an opportunity to appreciate Holy Week like this ever again, where you have very little distractions. Plainly, what I am telling you to do is read the last week of Jesus, thank Him for His sacrifice, and remember the sacrifice that He did make on Good Friday. We all are guilty of thinking that the Coronavirus shutdown is an annoyance or a frustration or a terror. In reality, if we are willing to think of it this way, it is an opportunity for us to truly appreciate our Savior.

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the end for the life of Jesus. In five days He will be put to death for our sins... but of course this isn't the end. The cries of Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord are warranted. Although Jesus does not come to create an earthly kingdom as most expect, He does come to establish His kingdom. One that has no end. Beloved Congregation, let us remember that fact as enter Holy Week. Let us pray.

### **Closing Prayer**