

**March 28, 2021 Palm Sunday (Year B)**

**Palm Sunday**

**Mark 11:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" <sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

Hosanna!

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

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

<sup>11</sup>Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

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Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God**

Many years ago Jil and I had the pleasure, dubious pleasure, of leading a church youth fellowship. Fearless and talented actors they were so we wrote them a play for Palm Sunday. As I remember it Jesus was coming into Washington DC in a VW convertible. An on the spot reporter was interviewing the crowd. Many reasons were given for coming out to see Jesus. My favorite was the socialite who wasn't there to see Jesus but was there to be seen seeing Jesus. It reminds me of those Christian halcyon days of the 1950's when churches were full, and religion was mainstream. Some went because of deeply held belief while others went because that's what you did. If you owned a local business it helped to be seen in church. If you were raising a family it set a good example for the kids. Ben Franklin was not much of a Christian himself, but he felt it was good for general morality to have churches around. My colleagues specialized in perfunctory prayers to open civic events and made generic statements about a bland sort of everybody faith.

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People have blamed the social turmoil of the nineteen sixties for washing out church attendance. The church's stance on a number of issues was too liberal or not liberal enough so people started staying home. Little thought has been given to the other changes going on as war protesters and civil rights marches filled the news. Dad was no longer the only one going out to work regularly. Children became scarce and had to be transported places to play. Sports served to be the new social Gospel. All of this robbed the church of its Palm Sunday Christians. You didn't need to be seen seeing Jesus so much as being seen running the little league or just running.

The events we memorialize in the week to come served to question this adulation on the arrival of Jesus. When the crowd didn't find all their neighbors cheering they started to fall away. When Jesus got arrested and jailed others turned back to everyday life. Then when he was executed, well who wants to be associated with a convicted felon?

We are here because we turned around for a second look at Jesus. When the dust settled and the tomb was found to be empty some few of those adoring crowds came back and embraced the mess that was Holy Week 33 AD. It is good to be reminded that true faith has never been popular. If we could guarantee good times there wouldn't be a problem filling pews, which would be a problem now that times aren't good and we have to protect the personal space of others.

We are here because the promise of God's presence in all our troubles is worth more than social standing. It is good to be in the company of believers who haven't fallen away. When the rewards of church attendance aren't social capital, but personal

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growth and friendship the numbers will not reach the heights of the middle of the last century.

This is not an excuse to go, oh well, people fall away. Those who aren't here may be Palm Sunday types or might even stay home when everyone runs to see Jesus come to town. The crowds needed him, but they didn't recognize he was the answer because they were expecting something very different. One of the reasons McDonald's has been so successful is a limited menu. The more things you try to prepare the harder it gets to maintain a standard. Too many cooks may spoil the stew, but too many stews are going to spoil the restaurant. We serve Jesus, granted he is a lot better than a Big Mac, but he is what he is. You might pretend that he is a flag waving American, but he is critical of many things we do each day. You might try to recruit him to slay the dragon of capitalism, but he is critical of all human systems when they lead to injustice. He is not a partisan of communism or a fascist no matter how many have tried to make him out to be one. The crowds turned out on Palm Sunday because they thought they could use Jesus to get what they wanted. He would not lead an army against the Romans or promote the Pharisees over the Sadducees.

So you are here because you have come to accept Jesus as he is. That can surely be irritating when you want him on your side, but Jesus insists that you must be on his side instead.

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**Closing Prayer:** Everlasting God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son to take our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross. In your mercy enable us to share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever