

### “Praise the King”

Did you notice it? Today is Palm Sunday. We had children parade in with palm branches. And yet nowhere in our three Scripture lessons did we read the word “palm.” According to everything that we read, we’re having a Palm Sunday without palms.

There is an explanation, and one that may be helpful for us to consider. We know the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and completely true, but that doesn’t mean that it includes every detail at every point. In fact, it appears that God in his wisdom inspired four Gospels for that very reason, that each one might share some unique details, even as they all overlap to a greater or lesser extent. So even though Luke doesn’t mention the palm branches, we know they were there. Other Gospel writers let us know that the people cut them and used them as they welcomed Jesus. Luke simply mentions the cloaks that were laid down along with the branches.

While we can have our Palm Sunday without palms, we won’t have our Palm Sunday without praise. No matter which Gospel account you read regarding Palm Sunday and Christ’s Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, you can’t miss it. The people praise him. They go out of their way to do so. They praise him with their voices and they praise him by their actions. They shout their praises and they honor their King with the branches and cloaks. Their praises set an example for us to follow. Our Palm Sunday celebration encourages us to praise the king.

Our text from Luke’s Gospel drives home the point that Jesus is a King who deserves our praise. Even before he began his triumphant donkey-ride, Jesus gave evidence that he was someone special. He predicted for his disciples precisely what they would find when they went into the village ahead. They found things exactly as Jesus predicted and returned with a colt, a young donkey, for Jesus to ride.

His own disciples, then, the ones who knew Jesus best and were closest to him, were the first to offer their cloaks to honor this King. These garments provided a makeshift riding surface. From there, the people continued this honor by spreading the cloaks along the road in front of the beast of burden.

Yes, Jesus was honored as a King, but there was clearly something different about this king. After all, what king needs to borrow a donkey when he needs a ride? What king depends on the generous offering of cloaks to line his path and to provide a seat? This is a humble King. This King is not seeking personal glory and fame. This is a King with a specific mission and purpose, one to serve others, to save others. Jesus is a spiritual King with a spiritual purpose. He rides into Jerusalem to pursue that mission, to die for the sins of the world.

This is your King. See him riding into Jerusalem for you. He deserves your praise. Even though he is the almighty Lord, who rules over heaven and earth, he humbles himself and rides on a donkey. Even though he knows exactly what will happen to him, he rides to his certain death. And he does it for you.

He does it for you because you need it. He humbles himself because you have failed to perfectly humble yourself before God and others. He serves you because you too often want to be served instead of serving others. He saves you because you are guilty of a list of sins too long and too numerous to count or to number or expound. This is the King that deserves your praise.

This is the King who received the praises of many that original Palm Sunday. We read: **When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”** Luke the evangelist

mentions once again the miracles that offered evidence of Christ's powerful reign. And the people reacted to such evidence with their shouts of praise.

Listen to the words they used. **"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"** Their words echo portions of Psalm 118, speaking of Jesus not only as the King, but as the King who comes in the Lord's name, doing the Lord's work, with the Lord's blessing. With these words the people heralded Jesus as the Messiah, the one God had promised who would save his people. And they go on to shout, **"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"** They describe the work of the Messiah in words similar to those the angels proclaimed on the occasion of his birth in Bethlehem. The work of the Messiah was to make peace in heaven, peace between God and sinful people. That peace comes through the forgiveness of sins, and it is to God's glory alone, since he alone provides that forgiveness.

Once again the Palm Sunday crowds have given us a valuable example. We praise God as we proclaim his wonderful deeds, as we proclaim the completed work of our Messiah. And that's exactly what we're doing here this morning and every Sunday as we gather. We hear God's Word. We witness the Messiah, and we proclaim his praise. In our hymns and songs, in our prayers and responses, we proclaim the works that our Lord has done for us. We give him the glory.

Of course, our praise can and should extend beyond what we do here in church. Our praise is not limited to words, but demonstrates itself in our actions. We praise God as we give our generous offerings to his work. We lay down palm branches in his path as we serve others in love. We offer our cloaks to the King as we live lives transformed by him rather than conformed to the ways of the world. We praise the Lord by following his example of humility.

And Jesus is pleased to receive our praise. Not everyone was happy with the attention that Jesus got on his way into Jerusalem, but Jesus was. **Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."** See, Jesus didn't need the people to proclaim his praises. He could have had the very stones cry out in praise of his name. Remember that he is the Lord of all. But that is not what he wanted. He wanted his people to proclaim his name and to offer their praises.

The Pharisees were suggesting that Jesus did not deserve the attention that he was given or the praises that he received. But he did indeed, and he would receive them. What is really amazing is that he was pleased to receive them from sinful people.

He gives us that same grace. It isn't our right to praise God. It isn't something that we have earned or deserved. God doesn't need our praises. He could get them from anywhere he wished. But he invites us to praise him. He forgives our sins and makes us able to praise him. And he is pleased to receive these praises. No matter who opposes us, we do not need to back down. We do not need to be quiet. Jesus deserves our praises and is pleased with them.

That day in Jerusalem was indeed a special day. Jesus rode triumphantly into the city amid the shouts of praises. He rode on to die. See, Holy Week is not a modern invention for our churches. The original Holy Week began the day that Jesus was proclaimed in this fantastic fashion to be the Messiah, the one chosen to save the world. Though many recognized the Messiah that Sunday, they didn't really know what to expect from him. They likely didn't expect that during that very week he would be executed. And they certainly didn't know that one week later he would have risen from the dead.

This Palm Sunday we celebrate all that Jesus did for us. We know that this triumphant ride foreshadows a gruesome death. But we also know that it anticipates a glorious resurrection. Therefore we join with all those who gathered to honor Jesus that day. He deserves it. He is pleased with it. Praise your King.

The Text: Luke 19:28–40 (NIV84)

<sup>28</sup> After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup> As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, <sup>30</sup> “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’ ”

<sup>32</sup> Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

<sup>34</sup> They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

<sup>35</sup> They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

<sup>37</sup> When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

<sup>38</sup> “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

<sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

<sup>40</sup> “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”