

## The Day of Triumph

Sterling UMC

April 5, 2009

Mark 11:1-11

(Not delivered in worship services due to Pastor Randy's illness)

We are rapidly approaching the season of Lent and this sermon series of messages exploring Jesus' last week. We have been looking at these last seven days of Jesus' life, seeking to follow Jesus on His journey to the cross. As we look at these climatic days we get a clearer understanding of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. And understanding and accepting can change your life.

So far we have looked at Monday the day of emotion, a day where Jesus wept over Jerusalem and drives the money-changers from the temple. This leads to Tuesday a day of questions, a day in which his enemies sought to trick, trap, and trip him up. They sought to find something they could use to eliminate the threat that Jesus posed to their religious authority. Wednesday was the day of transition. A day in which Jesus was apart from the crowd to lay hold of the power that would enable him to turn defeat into victory and death into life. And last week we looked at Thursday, the day of fellowship, a day that Jesus chose to spend with his disciples to impart to his final instructions.

This morning on this Palm Sunday we continue our series on the last week of Jesus' life with a flashback to the first day of this last week, the first Palm Sunday, the day of triumph.

What a splendid occasion that must have been--Jesus riding on that humble donkey, into the city of Jerusalem while children spread palm branches on the street in front of Him--people on the side shouting "Hosanna, Hosanna! Blessed is He who cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel."

They were festival days and the city of Jerusalem was crowded. During this time of year it became a large city even as it does on the holy days of our modern times. And those people who stood on the side knew that something special was happening in their very midst. Someone special was entering their city. The King of Israel was riding into their midst. And so they shouted "Hosanna."

Paul describes the same kind of event with regard to the coming of Christ into the world when he writes in Philippians: "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

A great and eternal and divine Palm Sunday--not simply the celebration of Jesus entering into Jerusalem, but Jesus Christ, the King of the Ages, who was in the form of God emptying Himself and coming into our world. That is the greater celebration that we

enter into this day.

There are four words that should help us understand the significance of Palm Sunday, the day of triumph. The first is this: Praise. Palm Sunday begins with praise. As Jesus rode into town, the people let loose with joyous, uninhibited praise. People shouting Hosanna. People waving palm branches. People placing branches in his path. Hailing Jesus as King. And he was and is King.

He had power that transcends earthly, military, technological, economic, and political power.

He had it all. He was King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace. The King of the Ages. He had it all. And yet HE GAVE it ALL UP.

That's the good news and the second word that helps us to understand the significance of Palm Sunday, humility. Here is the King of the Ages, and he's not riding in a chariot or on a white horse. He is not surrounded by soldiers or marching bands. No. He's riding on the back of a donkey. Humility. That was Jesus' way. That was his nature.

Remember the words I read a moment ago from Philippians: "Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

He had it all. He gave it all up. Humility.

King James V of Scotland would on occasion lay aside the royal robe of king and put on the simple robe of a peasant. In such a disguise, he was able to move freely about the land, making friends with ordinary folk, entering into their difficulties, appreciating their handicaps, sympathizing with them in their sorrow. And when as king he sat again upon the throne, he was better able to rule over them with fatherly compassion and mercy. That on an infinitely grander scale is what Jesus Christ, the King of the Ages, has done for us.

He humbled himself. He gave it all up to become one of us so that he might identify with us and we with him.

And that leads to the third word to help us understand the significance of the day of triumph, Sacrifice. You see Palm Sunday is but prelude to His passion. From the cheers of the crowd the scene shifts to crucifixion on the cross. That's why it is so important.

His sacrifice on the cross changes everything. "He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name. That at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

Why do we bow and why do we confess? Because, by His willingness to give Himself, He has changed our world. He has changed our relationship with God and with each other.

Robert Schuller tells the story of the owner of a beautiful hunting lodge in Scotland who had invited some of his friends to spend the weekend there. In their reveling and partying, one of the guests opened a bottle of soda and spilled it all over a wall. It left an ugly blotch. All through the rest of the weekend the guests watched that blotch dry into an ugly stain. The owner was very disturbed, very angry, and he let his guests know it.

When the weekend was over, they all started home, except for one of the guests who stayed behind. He kept staring at that stain on the wall and he took some charcoal out and started sketching around that stain. He turned the brown stain into some brown highland rocks. Then he painted a stream that splashed its water over the rocks. At the darkest edge of the stain he put a leaping stag. In the background he painted some pursuing hunters. Who was this man that painted this stain into a beautiful picture? It was Sir Edward Henry Landseer, a famous British animal artist. Eventually the lodge was turned into an inn and through the years other artists came and captured the spirit of that painting. They added paintings on the wall and turned what started out to be an ugly stain into a place of beauty.

Something like that happened on Calvary. He took the stain of our sin, something disgusting in his sight and transformed it so that in his eyes we are now an object of beauty. His sacrifice changed it all. The world will never be the same again because of what Christ did there on Calvary.

Praise, Humility, and Sacrifice; these things help us to understand exactly who our Lord is and what he has done for us. But one word needs to be added, and that is this: Victory. Our Lord Jesus had it all, He humbly gave it all, and his sacrifice changed it all, and now He offers it all to you and me. You and I can share in His victory, and we can know the bounteous blessings that flow from His sacrifice.

Dr. Samuel Shoemaker once said, "Religion can never be the answer to human problems. All of the religions of the world are inadequate. Christ alone is the answer. Christ alone understands. Christ alone forgives. Christ alone eliminates your guilt. Christ alone saves and then assures you that you are God's child and the most wonderful person possible! Christ alone fills the human heart with love--joy--peace--self-confidence."

He gives us victory. Let me ask you something this morning. Do you need victory in your life today? Is there something in your life right now that is keeping you from living in the victory that our Lord brings?

I'd like to ask you to do something for me right now. Close your eyes and imagine something. I want you to imagine your street – the street on which you live. Picture in your mind what that street looks like – where you live – where the trees are – where the other houses or apartments are – where people park their cars – the general amount of traffic that is typically on your street. Imagine yourself standing outside next to your street very close to where you live. Got that picture?

Now I want you to imagine that coming down your street you spot a crowd of people. And in the middle of that crowd of people is a man riding on a donkey. You recognize the man as Jesus. People are laying things down. Some of your neighbors are rushing to the curb to lay things down too. Jesus approaches where you are standing, riding closer, as he passes by what do you lay down? Is there something you are holding on to that is keeping you from living in victory? What do you need to lay down before him in order to claim the victory in your life?

Pride? We may not want to admit it, but perhaps pride stands in the way of our victory. You know what I mean? That feeling, that attitude that says, "I don't need anyone or anything. I can do it on my own. I'm self-sufficient." Friends you can't be full of yourself and full of him at the same time. Lay it down.

Fear? Perhaps fear at times stands in our way of victory. You're afraid to step out

in faith. You're afraid to speak up. You're too scared to give it all over to Jesus. Friends courage is not the absence of fear, it is the faith to know that even in the face of uncertainty the Lord is there. If Jesus came riding down your street, and if it's fear that stands in your way of victory, would you be willing to lay it down?

Doubt? Or maybe it could be that doubt hinders your ability to have victory. Maybe you're like Thomas in the Bible, you have to see, you have to touch before you believe. Maybe you're saying, "I'm just not sure if all this stuff is for real. I have some serious questions that need to get answered before I can really believe." Friends, it's tough to have victory when you have doubts. Friends Jesus has the answers. What he said to Thomas he says to you today, "Stop doubting and believe." Lay it down.

Maybe it is Possessions, an addiction, anger, guilt, a grudge, a sin, a physical or emotional condition, a burden, a worry that stands in your way of victory. Whatever it is, would you be willing to lay it down? Would you be willing to lay it at the feet of the King of the Ages?

My friends, that is what the coming of Christ into our world is all about. That's what this Palm Sunday, the day of triumph so dramatically reminds of. Praise. Humility. Sacrifice. Victory. He had it all, He gave it all, He changed it all, He offers it all. The good news this morning is that you do not have to use your imaginations. He is here this morning. He is seeking to make real His presence in our lives. We must lay our lives before him - our past, our present, our future. We must live only for him, for only then will we experience the fullness of his love. Only then will we find his kingly authority to help, heal, restore and resurrect our life. Only then will we know his power to save and forgive. And only then will we know true victory.