

04.13.25 ~ Palm Sunday

“The Lord Needs It!”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29 ^{NIV}

¹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

² Let Israel say:
“His love endures forever.”

¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰ This is the gate of the Lord
through which the righteous may enter.

²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

²² The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

²³ the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ The Lord has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵ Lord, save us!
Lord, grant us success!

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
From the house of the Lord we bless you.

²⁷ The Lord is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

²⁹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

Leader: These Words of Proclamation Are from God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Luke 19:28-40 ^{NIV}

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

²⁸ After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ “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. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

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

³⁴ They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

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

³⁷ 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:

³⁸ “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” ⁴⁰ “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

Leader: These Words of Declaration Are of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Loving and faithful God, we have journeyed with Jesus during this Lenten season, studying your word through prayer, devotions, and fasting. We now begin the real journey from his ministry in Bethany back up to Jerusalem, as he prepares to accept the consequences of his inheritance. We are not prepared for the darkness to come nor for the joy that follows the empty tomb. So, Lord, help us to get ready; open our minds and hearts for today’s message and the Holy Week that follows. Speak through this messenger’s words as you renew and strengthen us for the weeks to come. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Hosanna! Hosanna! Wave your palm branches as we imagine Jesus walking down our street and into our church. Next week is Easter already, Resurrection Sunday! So, I invite you to continue your Easter celebration with us by signing up for the Good Friday “Disciples’ Lunch” with the Lord’s Supper, and our annual Contemplative Service of Scripture, Singing, and Prayer in the Fellowship Hall at noon on Friday. Then if you’d like to join the New Beginning Missionary Baptist Church, their Good Friday service is in the Chapel at 6 pm, and Sunrise service on Easter is in the Chapel at 7:00 am. After a local restaurant for breakfast, we’ll gather on Resurrection Sunday at our normal Bible Study and

Worship times with special music as well. Hope you can be with us for one or more of the services.

These passages are tied together closely even though they were written centuries apart. The psalm attributed to King David was written for the Feast of Tabernacles at the founding of the second temple. Entry into the temple was a joyful ceremony; the king who was once rejected becomes the cornerstone. There is a prophetic tone of the coming Messiah that our hindsight interprets as Jesus. The writer celebrates God's people Israel and his own deliverance with a holy blessing and an appeal to God's mercy and love. The psalmist gives thanks for the answered prayers of his people's salvation and prosperity. It was a well-known liturgical psalm and so loved that the familiar words were sung at the procession of Jesus coming back into Jerusalem as the once rejected Messiah's triumphant song. We read it today and interpret the rejected cornerstone or "capstone" of our faith (in some translations) as Jesus and the punishment of his crucifixion with God's loving and merciful salvation interpreted as being the resurrection. The triumphant entry into Jerusalem sets the stage for both.

Let's look at Luke's Palm Sunday account. It is slightly different than the other gospels in that there are no palm branches and no words of "Hosanna." Yet the context is the same. Jesus was ready to turn himself in to authorities and proclaim his messianic role. He was to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9-10:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,
 on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
¹⁰ He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
 and the war horse from Jerusalem;
 and the battle bow shall be cut off,
 and he shall command peace to the nations . . .

“The king” refers to the awaited Messiah riding in to take his rightful leadership on a donkey with a colt. Luke, as a detailed physician and historian, takes care to explain the preparation details and the disciples’ near-miraculous achievement of finding the exact donkey with a colt! Jesus laments for his Jerusalem and the greedy marketplace the temple had become; he laments the Pharisees’ religious arrogance and objects to the materialistic focus on war to build up the Roman empire. We know from his ministry and miracles that Jesus has empathy for the poor and marginalized.

All these characteristics help Jesus and his disciples to carefully plan a sort of “protest” parade, according to authors Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan in their 2007 book *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus’ Last Days in Jerusalem*. They suggest that the Triumphal Entry may have been a subversive act of anti-imperialism. Every year, the Roman governor of Judea would ride up to Jerusalem from his western coastal home to be present for Passover, when the city grew from 50,000 to over 200,000 people. There was also a political rally of sorts with Pontius Pilate’s big parade of warhorses, guards, and armaments to display his leadership, power, and strength. We do not know that Jesus intentionally chose the opposite direction, coming from the east, and more humble style of entry, but there is exegesis, evidence, and logic to support the interpretation.

By the time the disciples and Jesus arrived at the Mount of Olives, they had walked 17 miles, so Jesus was physically tired. He would process from the Mount down the hills into the city of Jerusalem, past the graveyards, and through the enormous city and temple gates. It was a descent that was strenuous I can assure you having walked it. The disciples were instructed to find and secure for their leader a donkey with a colt from a willing owner to facilitate the journey. If asked why, Jesus repeats the words “the Lord needs it.” Or “the Lord has need of it.” Not Jesus the human, but the Lord, he declares. It was also the rainy season and slippery, so physically, he may have had a need. But using our own cultural interpretations, contemporary scholars assume the humble donkey was an optical contrast to Pilate’s armored warhorses. Although Luke omits the Zechariah passage and focuses on Jesus’ impact on the city and the event’s impact on believers, the other Gospels agree that the procession story fulfilled the prophecy, so it is not just a literary motif. Cloaks were placed on the unbroken (and therefore sacred) animal; yet other gospels and our anthem indicate the people threw their cloaks on the wet ground almost like a “red carpet” of welcome and affirmation.

This “red carpet” appearance reveals how important it was that Jesus was seen in a leadership role, albeit a counter-cultural leadership role. Luke is setting the tone for what is to come, both at the crucifixion, resurrection, and afterward as the church develops and grows in Acts. This was not a manipulative marketing appearance, but it was crucial for Jesus to be seen and singled out as the ordained, anointed Son of God. Luke prefers the Greek word *doxa* (“Glory”-radiance and splendor) to “Hosanna” (save us), and he draws a thread from Christmas to Easter:

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord . . . ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Jesus and his parents needed a stable and a manger—a bed for the night—a practical yet humble form of hospitality. The Lord needed a mode of transport to finish his tasks and earthly ministry and chose a humble vehicle that related to the people. We are those same stubborn people trying to understand our faith and belief yet are easily influenced by pomp and circumstance. As we sing hosanna ourselves, let us remember the glory that brought the incarnate Jesus into our lives. Let us remember the splendor and radiance of our belief and baptism. The Lord needs it too! And we need him. Let us celebrate, then mourn, and then celebrate again next Sunday. Amen? Amen! ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for your teaching and your life. May we embody our beliefs through our actions and spiritual gifts. Help us Lord to focus on you this Holy Week and to witness the glory of our faith through worship, study, ritual, and fellowship. Let us be strong and resolute to speak out against injustice; let us be loving enough to serve others and to share our resources with those in need and in fear. Guide us, love us, and have mercy upon our shortcomings. We thank you Lord for your sacrifice. In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.