

**03.29.26 ~ Palm Sunday**  
**“Hosanna—You Must Save Us!”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Words to Ponder**

**John 12:1-19** <sup>NIV</sup>

Pew Bible 936

*Jesus Anointed at Bethany*

<sup>1</sup> Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. <sup>3</sup> Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

<sup>4</sup> But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, <sup>5</sup> “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” <sup>6</sup> He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

<sup>7</sup> “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup> You will always have the poor among you [*Deut. 15:11*], but you will not always have me.”

<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, <sup>11</sup> for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

*Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King*

<sup>12</sup> The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!”

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

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

<sup>14</sup> Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

<sup>15</sup> “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;  
see, your king is coming,  
seated on a donkey’s colt.”

<sup>16</sup> At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

<sup>17</sup> Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. <sup>18</sup> Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. <sup>19</sup> So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

**Leader: These Words Are Prophecy Fulfilled.**

**People: Thanks be to God!**

**Words of Procession**

**Matthew 21:1-11** NIV

Pew Bible 855

<sup>1</sup> As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

<sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

<sup>5</sup> “Say to Daughter Zion,  
‘See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”  
“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”  
“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

<sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

**Leader: These Actions Were Prophesied (*yet misunderstood*).**

**People: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Dear Lord, we come raising and waving palms of joy and celebration because we know the rest of the story. We seek your presence as we worship you today and every Sunday! Thank you for the safety and freedom to gather in fellowship and study openly when so many Christians around the world do so in secret especially this week. As we remember your ministry and teachings in these unsettled times, let us forgive others as you forgive us. Let us strive and pray for peace around the world as we prepare ourselves for Holy Week. Please illuminate the Gospel story and empower us to share it with others who don't know you. Lord, speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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Happy Palm Sunday! Excellent waving of the palms! Hosanna! Let us all say Hosanna! The people in the crowds welcomed Jesus back to Jerusalem, treating him as a victorious king. Despite or because of our

news headlines, our long prayer insert for personal and global needs, and the impacts of war, we cry out Hosanna – Save Us! Like today’s cries to God, we really mean “Hosanna—You Must Save Us!” We feel somewhat helpless to improve our circumstances; some people protest politically out of frustration and philosophy. Others kneel and pray. We may feel ambivalent this Palm Sunday. Joyful to be here remembering the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, looking forward to Easter and Spring; and yet, we lament the loss of life around the world and in our personal families and communities, not to mention having a solemn reverence for the cross to come. So, on Good Friday, we will journey from a disciples’ lunch with communion moving contemplatively toward the cross. We invite you to attend at noon (please sign up so we know how much food to have.) Then we’ll regather Resurrection Sunday at our normal Hymn Study and Worship times. I also encourage you to catch up on your devotional booklet this week. There are a few booklets left out on the big hall table or in the church office if you did not receive one.

As we conclude our short Lenten journey with Jesus in the Gospel of John, we read the account of Mary’s anointing of Jesus. It was six days before the Passover; he had gone back to Bethany, to the home of his beloved friends, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha for a dinner in his honor. Mary’s lavish gift of nard (almost a pint – 12 ounces) was an expensive perfume worth about a year’s wages; she generously poured it out on Jesus’ feet, a symbol of the family’s gratitude for Jesus’ miracle of raising their brother from the dead! Jesus was grateful for this gesture, but Judas was outraged. He criticized the expense as foolish with a judgmental air of good stewardship for the poor—such hypocrisy. None of those present

yet understood the double meaning her sacrificial offering had for Jesus, who knew the plot to kill him was growing. Mary's action was a foretelling of the spices they would use to anoint his body both in life (here at the dinner) and in death (after the crucifixion at the tomb). The fragrance that filled Lazarus' house in gratitude for Jesus' restoring him to life is a hint of the holy fragrance of Jesus' resurrection to come next week!

But before Easter, in both the John and Matthew passage, we see Jesus coming into Jerusalem. Not only did everyone in town find out this rebel was coming back and was a powerful healer and miracle worker, but also, they were there for the Passover feast and worship. Jews were required to attend and make appropriate sacrifices. Many of the curious and non-Jews followed Jesus as well, so he created and drew a parade of followers!

Now, look at a contemporary artist's interpretation of the scene in the image on your bulletin cover. Hosanna meant bless us, yes, but here their cries were a mixture of praise **and** a request for Jesus to save them from Roman occupation. They were hoping for political deliverance, a warrior-king to fight the empire; they acknowledged Jesus as the "Son of David" from prophecy who would save them and build a new kingdom. Or so they thought. Note the elements in the painting to draw your own conclusions: diverse international flags, obeisance in their physical demeanor, climbing trees (a tribute to Zaccheus' story of spiritual transformation and devotion to Jesus), crowds cheering Jesus on in praise for a new Messiah and ruler; and finally, did you notice Jesus' reaction on the donkey? He bows his head frustrated with their misunderstanding of

his role and purpose, knowing what was to come. Jesus tried to help them understand by his symbolism. There was a donkey not a war-horse or chariot to bring him; he carried no sword or javelin as Roman soldiers would have and wore no military uniform to convey his power. Jesus was accustomed to traveling on foot but chose to humble himself on a donkey for this 2-mile journey from Bethany to Jerusalem. In the Matthew passage, Jesus came to Jerusalem in a “gentle manner,” riding humbly on this donkey with her colt that the disciples acquired, just as the prophet Zecharia in 9:9 wrote. Jesus taught a profound lesson of accessibility, not celebrity. He ignored the accolades and looked people in the eye – think about the height of a donkey vs. a chariot. People could and did interrupt his journey to speak with him, to touch his robes. Christ came not to overcome Rome, but to meet the people where they were, and to silence their fears and anger toward the slavery and taxation of Rome.

Although he travelled slowly, he travelled surely and confidently toward his own death. He defied the authorities by being so public; he was a wanted man, after all. The Pharisees were looking for reasons to arrest him to stop his ministry, but they decided to do it after the festival. Even the disciples could not understand his decision to use a work animal or his willingness to draw such a huge crowd in public. The crowds kept increasing and this provoked the Pharisees who witnessed his growing popularity. Later, of course, once Christ was glorified and in the presence of his father, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples, and they remembered how all these things had been prophesied in the Scriptures.

However you interpret the bulletin photo or Mary’s extravagance, please think about how these chapters challenge the church. Are we all

about celebrities and large numbers of worshippers? Do we continue to build monuments to the institution of religion, or do we put our resources toward serving the poor, the immigrant, the unhoused. Do we support other ministries and social programs that provide assistance or expertise? What is our primary role today in society? The salvation of souls, spreading the Gospel, and being examples to others of Jesus' love and sacrifice? Are we comforting others in times of crisis, life and death situations, physical birth and new second spiritual birth, times of war and periods of peace? Are we a beacon of truth in a world of lies and deceit? Do we care for one another in sickness and in health?

This paradox of servant leadership is most visible on Palm Sunday, so which view of Jesus will you choose? He is both humble servant and strong spiritual leader! This week, please turn to the Scriptures and prayer for your own reflection. Join us Good Friday for a re-telling of Jesus' journey through music, prayer, and Scripture reading. Then we'll see you Sunday morning for the best news of all! Amen? Amen! ||

**Please pray with me:** Dear Jesus, we love you. We thank you in advance for your sacrifice and ask you to inspire and enlighten us this week as we ponder our own sin and forgiveness. Let us remember that despite our busy lives and decisions, you alone are our source, substance, and light. Help us to be true witnesses to your grace, love, and mercy. Strengthen the roots of our faith; help us to share the light of Christ, letting him shine through us. May our spiritual practices be disciplined and transformative, while our focus be only upon you. We pray in the holy name of Jesus, Amen.