

Palm Sunday Sermon from Mark 11:1-11 – *“Who is this King”*

When we read Mark’s Gospel, we find that Mark devotes one-third of his writing to the last seven days of Jesus’ life and what we know as “passion week.” When we read John’s Gospel, John devotes one-half of his writing to Jesus’ final seven days. In total of all four gospels combined, 30 of the 89 chapters relate to Jesus’ final week on earth. This morning, we read today’s passage about the procession that took place upon Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. We will soon find that in all the excitement and anticipation of his arrival, these would quickly fade away. Traditionally, we call it the “triumphal entry.” The past now becomes historical for us, aware that his entry and declaration of His Kingship ended not in a buzz of anticipation for God to do His most extraordinary work during the Passover celebration but instead ended in a “reception that people would miss altogether.”

Historians tell us that Jerusalem's population was around 80,000 at the time of this Passover and that between two and three million people would crowd into the city for the celebration feast. Usually, there was one lamb per ten people, and that would put it at 2.6 million people possibly. Doing the math, Ten years after this particular Passover, there is a record in Jewish history that two hundred and sixty thousand lambs were slain at that Passover. Imagine a massive crowd around Jesus that must have been in the hundreds of thousands. It was in God’s perfect timing that this time and place would soon see the one sacrificial lamb be crucified on that Friday. Who was this King who stood in the dark shadow of the Cross on the Mount of Olives to answer his disciples’ questions about those who wait for the Master’s coming? His disciples ask, “When will these things become, and what will be the sign of your coming and the close of the age?” We will soon find out as Jesus says to two of his disciples, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here.” Let’s pray.

We pray, gracious God, for your help as we look to the Bible together. It is so often hard for us when we find ourselves familiar with the material and immediately assume that we have this both understood and applied. Help us in speaking and hearing so that we may hear from you through your Holy Spirit and in Christ’s name. Amen.

Today, millions around the world are joining us to celebrate Palm Sunday in the Christian tradition. It is Passion Week, and Jesus is in complete control. We need to understand that the people who would be celebrating the Passover on that occasion in Jerusalem were looking back to their deliverance from the bondage of their forefathers in Egypt but also looking forward to a final liberation when the Messiah King would come to restore them to everything foretold through the prophets.

Let us first consider Jesus' identity. In the second chapter of Matthew, Matthew tells us that the entire city of Jerusalem was stirred at the birth of Jesus. The wise men go to Herod's palace and ask, “Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?” When Herod finds out about this, he is disturbed, and all Jerusalem is with him.” Now, at the height of his manhood, Jesus rides into Jerusalem, and we find the city of Jerusalem is “stirred.” It would be nice if the town of Shippensburg would be stirred to the awareness of why Jesus came and that the truth of

Jesus would stir the great towns and cities of this nation. The only way that can happen is through the challenge of faithful preaching about the truth of the Bible to those who claim to be his disciples.

When the people became stirred, they asked the question, “Who is this?” The issue was his identity. Even in today’s age and culture, the question of who Jesus is becomes quite relevant and necessary for those who are considering the Bible, and whoever is thinking these things out about Jesus of Nazareth has to come to terms with his identity. Even when reading this familiar material, the gospel writers write in such a manner. That there is meaning in the way Jesus enters.

Throughout the Old Testament, there are pieces of information and threads, so to speak, to join the dots that link to building a jigsaw puzzle. Perhaps when you read a piece of scripture on its own, it might not make much sense. But when you put all the pieces together in relation to one another, to the big picture of the Bible, then suddenly, I hope and pray we begin to take hold of what truth the Bible holds for us. For instance, we read about the donkey, which is prominent in the text. There is no entry without the donkey or, in this text, a colt. Remember what I said earlier: there is meaning in the way Jesus enters. There is significance to the donkey; otherwise, it would not be in the Bible.

Think about this: this is the only place in the Bible where Jesus rides. Everywhere else, we see him walking. Jesus gives explicit instructions to his disciples as to where to go and what they should say, and they carry out his instructions. From the beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis, we begin to find these threads to connect the dots; remember what I said about threads, pieces of information, like a thread of text in your phone, where we can go back through all these previous conversations to the original point of contact. Anyhow, in Genesis chapter 49, verses 10-11, we find an anticipation of a coming day following Jacob blessing his sons. We read, “The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.” Here, we first get a glimpse into the future with the early hints of a coming king, a universal king, and a lion who is peaceful and who will gather his people under his rule. Early readers of the Bible would wonder: “Who is this king.”

Again, in Matthew 21:5, we see another piece of the puzzle quoted from Zechariah 9:9, “Say to Daughter Zion saying Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is ^{1c}just and **endowed with salvation**, humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the ²foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will end from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

Who will this king be? In all of history, kings have chosen their mode of transportation. A donkey in times of peace and a horse in times of war. And on this particular morning, Jesus says get me this donkey (one that has never been ridden) and then tells his disciples to speak to the owner. I will bring it back. The point of all this is to make sense of the little threads connecting

the dots written in scripture to the bigger picture of the jigsaw. It is a fulfillment of a prophetic word. Now, Jesus was going public on purpose. Previously, Jesus repeatedly withdrew from the crowds. Still, now, Jesus demonstrated his all-knowingness and control of the situation, which should bring us comfort, for He has all the details of our lives figured out. We can find encouragement from the fact that Jesus enlisted the donkey in His service! Why? The Lord needed that donkey to fulfill His mission on earth, and I find that fantastic, just as he has graciously chosen to make us part of His plan to fulfill his mission!

I want to go back to Old Testament prophecy, reflecting on the Book of Daniel. As you well know, Daniel was a faithful man of God and a prophet who predicted, in two verses of Chapter 9:26-27, a precise timetable for the coming of their Messiah to rebuild Jerusalem. “After the sixty-two sevens, the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven. In the middle of the seven, he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

Several scholars have looked at this passage, but there was this investigation guy named Sir Robert Anderson of Scotland Yard’s criminal investigation who wrote a book on “The Coming Prince.” It is a lengthy book that you can investigate for yourselves and, in fact, is now accessible in PDF form. However, the bottom line is that Anderson’s observations and theory concluded that the Sixty-nine weeks of years reckoned from the prophetic date during the times of Nehemiah reflecting on the date of the 14 **March B.C. 445, ending** on the 6th of April A.D. 3, the tenth of the Jewish month Nisan. The exact day on which the sixty-nine weeks ended was the fateful day on which the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem in fulfillment of the prophecy of the prophet Zechariah 9:9, when, for the first and only occasion in all His earthly sojourn, He was acclaimed as “Messiah the Prince the King, the Son of David.” I don’t have enough time here this morning to go through all of his calculations and the subsequent opinionated critique of Anderson’s interpretation of the 70 weeks, but here was the first time that Jesus presented himself as their King to the nation, according to the prophecy of Daniel and Zechariah. “Go to the village and bring that donkey to me.”

We read from John 12:16. “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.” It was encouraging to me to read this passage because I read the Bible all the time, and I do not always get it until after many times. It makes me realize that our source of confidence comes from reading Scripture and when we recognize God’s Word governs our lives, not when it is governed by man’s word or people’s opinions. Jesus is more appealing than religion, and scripture is more reliable than opinion.

So, what about this donkey in the story? We see the donkey as the most compliant one in the story, an hour in which the donkey displays how everything has changed for him carrying Jesus into the city of Jerusalem as if the donkey understood what was happening. The donkey was carrying the one spoken about in Zechariah 9:9. There is a poem written by G. K Chesterton

titled “The Donkey,” told from the perspective of the self-hating donkey Christ rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It goes like this:

“When fishes flew, and forests walked, and figs grew upon thorn, some moment when the moon was blood, then surely, I was born. With monstrous head and sickening cry and ears like errant wings, the devil’s walking parody on all four-footed things. The tattered outlaw of the earth, of ancient crooked will; starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb, I keep my secret still. Fools! For I also had my hour; one far fierce hour and sweet: there was a shout about my ears and palms before my feet.”

In closing, allow me to ask you this question: The same God who engineered this donkey and these exact dates that Jesus fulfilled, do you think He can take care of your life and problems? Do you believe that this God is worthy of you surrendering your life to? I say yes and amen. There is no difference between us and the ancient people of Jerusalem. A host of different groups of people were there on that day, the ones who had been admirers, curious of Jesus for three and a half years. Some witnessed Jesus calling Lazarus from the tomb. Some had heard that he had raised Lazarus from the dead. Some were opposers as the religious leaders. Some were pretenders of being committed to Jesus, and some were the learners and committed disciples who witnessed Jesus’ resurrection. Friends, Jesus is on his way back, returning for the committed ones who have confessed to him as Lord and that God has raised Him from the dead.

Upon observation and conclusion, who is this king? Hopefully, you will respond by saying that this king is worthy of being the Messiah endowed with salvation, the Prince of Peace, Redeemer, and friend. Amen.