

"THE WORLD HAS GONE AFTER HIM"

Palm Sunday Evening Meditation

*Scriptures for Palm Sunday of Holy Week:

- Jesus Enters Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19)
- Jesus Predicts His Death (John 12:20-36)
- Jesus Visits the Temple (Matthew 21:14-17; Mark 11:11)

We begin our Holy Week meditations by looking at what the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday *caused* people to *feel* and *experience* for the rest of the week - and for the rest of eternity for that matter. As Jesus rode into the City of David on the foal of a donkey, unmistakably stating His self-identity as the King of Israel and the long-awaited Messiah, onlookers were filled with anticipation and longing for a Savior as many cried "Hosanna" (or "save us!"; Matthew 21:9). His disciples, even deeper, "began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice" (Luke 19:37). Word of Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead had spread to many people, and that is why they came to see His entry into Jerusalem on this day. They were hoping, longing, and yearning that He was indeed the Messiah — the cure to their Roman oppression.

But the Pharisees were not so happy about this. Jesus was causing a disruption and, in their eyes, was leading people astray by creating hysteria in the city during the *holy* (little h) week of Passover. So they asked Jesus to "rebuke your disciples" (Luke 19:39), to which Jesus responded, even "if these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Luke 19:40). Nothing could stop all creation from pointing to, running to, and yes praising Jesus. At this point, the Pharisees exasperatingly said to one another,

"You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him." **John 12:19**

And so the tone of Holy Week begins with these responses to the central character of *history*, Jesus of Nazareth. By the end of Palm Sunday evening though , only two options remain as clear conclusions to *His story*, and two options only. As theologians Andreas Köstenberger and Justin Taylor say,

*"Up to this point in Jesus's ministry, he could still have managed to live a long, happy, peaceful life, but his actions on Sunday set in motion a series of events that could result only in either **his overthrow of the Romans and the current religious establishment — or his brutal death.** He has crossed the point of no return; there would be no turning back."*

(pg. 32, *The Final Days of Jesus*)

And so how do you and I respond today to Jesus as He stunningly proclaims His Royal Reign over all creation and all nations and all people and all diseases and all circumstances? Are we threatened by His power? Or are we flinging ourselves unabashedly at the ground before Him, and raising anything we can find high in the air and so say from the depths of our hearts, "Save us, Jesus! You are the blessed One!"

In reality, by the end of this Palm Sunday evening, both options actually begin to take shape and show true form. Jesus clearly has pronounced Himself as the King who comes in the name of the Lord. But right after coming into Jerusalem, Jesus begins a dialogue with some Greeks about the reality that He knows He will die, and the necessity of it. No one could possibly have understood what Jesus was meaning when He first said,

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." John 12:23-25

Jesus knew that His being the True King of the world and the necessity of His death five days later were intimately intertwined in the loving and gracious plan of Redemption, authored before the history of the world by the Father of Heaven and earth. Jesus was offering salvation to all through His own death. And yet, the Pharisees right after, and many of us today (even with the great advantage of seeing *this* side of the cross of Good Friday), didn't understand. The Pharisees couldn't believe... why?

"for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God." John 12:43

Many of us enter this Holy Week in the same heart space as the Pharisees. The coronavirus and its impacts on our daily lives have shaken us all. But the gracious and loving plan of Redemption from God Almighty is advancing even still. The Good News of hope in Jesus is being offered freely to us anew again this week.

Jesus finishes His Palm Sunday simply in the temple — healing people and spending time with children, the two things many of us are praying the most about in these current days. May God encounter us afresh as we walk with Jesus this Holy Week.

In Christ,

Pastor Steven

