

Who Is This?

Matthew 21:10, Palm Sunday, April 9, 2017

Palm Sunday is the day when the whole Church on earth—professes to the whole world—out loud—**our deeply-held Christian belief** that of all of the human beings who have ever lived out their lives in the history of this world, the **most important life ever lived, by far, is that of Jesus Christ!** And furthermore that the **most important part of Jesus' life** was that **momentous week** that ended it.

You and I can see how important that last week of Jesus' life was when we discover the large amount of space that each of the four evangelists devote to it in their respective writing of the four Gospels! *Matthew devotes 25% of his Gospel; Mark devotes 33%, Luke devotes 20% and St John devotes 50% of his Gospel* account to the events that took place there in Jerusalem that first “Holy Week!”

And it's quite possible that St. **Paul summarized it all up for us best, one day**, when he writing to some dear friends of his in Rome, *saying of Jesus Christ: “He was put to death for our transgressions and raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25)!*

On this Palm Sunday, we also are reminded that nothing, absolutely nothing that happened there in Jerusalem during that first Holy Week ever came about as a surprise to our Savior.

I. PLANNED DEMONSTRATION

Brothers and sisters just think for a few moments about all the planned demonstrations that you and I have witnessed throughout our lifetimes! There have been countless tickertape parades given for soldiers who have returned home from foreign wars. There are parades for political and military leaders, even as there was that great tickertape parade for those three astronauts in New York City on August 13, 1969, for Neil Armstrong, Edwin Aldrin and Michael Collins, the astronauts of the APOLLO II MISSION, when they returned home to earth—during which Neil Armstrong became the first man ever to walk on the moon!

But all of those parades, for the most part, have been very short lived—but the Palm Sunday parade continues in motion by millions of believers throughout the history of the Church and still today!

Jesus wanted his disciples to know *that nothing, absolutely nothing that took place there in the city Jerusalem that first Holy Week ever came about by mere chance or happenstance.* The Gospel writers are clear to tell us that *Jesus made arrangement with the Hertz-Rent-a-Donkey people ahead of time; so that when those two disciples went to fetch that donkey, whichever disciples they were: a female, and her young colt, a foal, they were there on standby just waiting to be picked up.*

It's only Matthew who tells that there were two donkeys involved in that Palm Sunday parade, and it is fitting that he does so, since he was writing primarily for a Jewish audience. Matthew sees the events of this day—fulfilling the ancient prophecy of the Prophet Zechariah, when he wrote in Zechariah 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O Daughter of Jerusalem! Lo,

your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Matthew 21:5)!

JESUS CERTAINLY NEVER WANTED ANY OF HIS DISCIPLES BACK THEN or any of us who are his disciples still today TO FALSELY IMAGINE THAT ANYTHING THAT EVER TOOK PLACE IN JERUSALEM DURING THAT FIRST HOLY WEEK EVER CAME AS A SURPRISE TO HIM! This is **why Jesus announces so many of these things to them deliberately ahead of time.**

- Jesus announced that he would be BETRAYED BY ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES ahead of time.
- Jesus announced that he would be DENIED BY PETER, ahead of time.
- Jesus announced that the disciples would be OVERCOME WITH A DEEP SENSE OF TORMENT AND GRIEF, when for a few days he would be taken away from them! But Jesus also prophesied, *“In a little while you will see me no more and then you will see me; because I live, you also will live!”*
- Jesus **promised that the Holy Spirit** would, one day, be poured out upon the disciples ahead of time—the Comforter, the Counselor, their Advocate—who would be and abide with them forever!

Here on that first **Palm Sunday** JESUS IS ACCLAIMED AS A KING: *“Behold, your King is coming to you, righteous and having salvation!”*

And what a King he is! He isn't a warlike monarch arriving on a battle steed to marshal his armies for action. Rather, in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, Jesus comes *“gentle and riding on a donkey!”* Those leaders who rode on donkeys at such times as this meant that they were coming to secure a PEACE TREATY between hostile and sometimes even warring nations! Jesus was coming in a *spirit of peace—to usher in—a New Covenant of Peace* that God the Heavenly Father was now longing to make—not just between him and the Jewish people—but between him and all the peoples of this world!

All of the people began to cry out: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” BOTH OF THESE quotes ARE TAKEN FROM PSALM 118.

“Hosanna” is a Hebrew word—that most literally translated into English means: *“Save us now!”* And the second part of the peoples' continuous cry: *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”* are words that are found in the Hebrew text just as we have them here in our English translations!

II. WHO IS THIS?

Matthew ends his account of the triumphal entry by telling us that when Jesus entered Jerusalem, *“THE WHOLE CITY WAS STIRRED,”* as it had been *33 years earlier* when the Wise Men came to inquire: *“Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews?”*

Here they ask, *“Who is this?”* The crowds answered, *“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee” (v. 10-11).*

While this certainly doesn't seem to be a very profound answer to us, we can never forget that we live **on this side of the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**, while these people were still in the dark and still without the Holy Spirit to guide them in their answering of this all-important question.

When you stop and think about it, this little three word question, **“Who is this?”** is the really the very question that James Wesley Lewis Jr. and

Charles Spalding Stuck II – have been seeking to find the answer to—in the catechetical studies here with our Deacon, Mr. Bill Boykin, the past two years!

On that first Palm Sunday, let's remember that the Jewish people lining the street of that road leading into Jerusalem were still thinking that the Promised Messiah who was to come—would be coming in the guise of a powerful political ruler, the kind who could marshal an army and drive out the occupying Romans.

Who is he? *Jesus presented himself repeatedly as the Savior of the human race, claiming to be God!* Is he? If so, he is more than a mere man. If not, then he is at best mistaken with respect to his own identity—or at worst—a vile deceiver!

The great Christian author C. S. Lewis wrote similarly, *“You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: Or else he is a madman or something far worse! You can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about Jesus being a great human teacher. Why? Because our Lord Jesus himself has not left that option available to us!*

C. S. Lewis then goes on to say: *“Thinking of Jesus merely as a good man or a good teacher is impossible, because good teachers do not lie to and deceive their students! So what then are the alternatives?*

*If our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ were not who he claimed to be—then the only logical conclusion we could come to is that he must have been **insane or suffering from megalomania**.* Hitler suffered from megalomania. Napoleon probably did as well. Megalomaniacs are people who suffer from a severe form of narcissism—self-centered and totally focused on themselves to the Nth Degree—seeing other people in this world, more or less, as mere extensions of themselves, whom God put here on earth to serve their every need and to fulfill every one of their whims and fashion.

The second possibility is that Jesus was a deceiver and that he set out right from the start to fool people. Brothers and sisters, if Jesus was simple a deceiver then he was the best deceiver who ever lived. On the other hand, if Jesus was a deceiver, if he was not God, he should be judged as a devil, for he did not merely say, *“I am God,” and let it go at that. He said, “I am God come to save humanity! I am the way of salvation! Trust me with our eternal destiny!”*

Jesus taught us that God is holy, that we are separated from him because of our sins, and that he came to be our sin-bearer; the Lamb of God to take away our sins from us, day by day, as we continue to look to him and follow him all the days of our lives! This is good news, even-great news—but only if it is true! If it is not true, then his followers are of all human beings, as St Paul explains to us in **I Corinthians 15:** *“The most to be pitied!”* If it is not true, then Jesus has sent generations of gullible followers to a hopeless eternity!

Is he a deceiver? Is that the explanation we have for One who was known for being **“meek and lowly,”** who became a poor traveling preacher in order to help the poor and teach those whom others despised?

Somehow the facts do not fit! We cannot face the facts of his life and teaching and still call Jesus a deceiver! What then? If he was not a deceiver or insane, there is only one possibility that is left open for us! **JESUS IS WHO HE SAID HE IS!** He is the One the Gospels proclaim him to be. He is the Christ, the Son of God, the crucified and Risen Savior of the world!

Yet, Jesus himself tells us repeatedly that once we have been brought to faith in him—how important it is that we **remain vitally connected to him**, **FIRST** of all, by our not separating ourselves—from his body of believers he calls the Church. He said, *“I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my Word will never pass away!”*

Secondly, Jesus also tells us to become lifelong students of his Word, of his Word as found in the Holy Scripture all throughout our lives. In John 5:39, Jesus tells us: *“Search the Scriptures for in them you believe you have eternal life, and these are those writing that testify about me!”*

Thirdly, he also tells us to come to Holy Communion faithfully: “Do this,” he said, “as often as you drink it in remembrance of me!”

Did you hear what the **Prophet Isaiah** said to us in our Old Testament lesson today? *“The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakes, he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught” (Isaiah 50:4)* Learning how to genuinely listen when other people are speaking to us is one of the hardest goals to ever achieve in this life as a human being, but so vital if we are to ever learn how to sustain meaningful relationships, over time, and throughout our lifetimes!

Recently I came across a true story about a young girl, named Heather, who was 7 years old, who according to an **EAR DOCTOR** (sometimes known also as an **EYE, EAR, NOSE AND THROAT DOCTOR**), had ears that worked just fine, but for some reason the words she heard never made it to her brain. Shortly after a Thanksgiving Holiday, for example, the doctor asked her: “Heather, what did you eat on Thanksgiving Day?” She looked puzzled, so the doctor restated his question: “What kind of food did your Mom make for you and your family on Thanksgiving Day?”

Heather broke into a beautiful smile and said, “Red shoes!”

Heather could actually hear the sounds of the words that were being spoken to her—but she paid no attention to their meaning!”

Heather’s problem was a tragic one, but a problem that often happens in many worshiper services for people all throughout our nation every Sunday. This story was brought to my attention by a man who recently died, but who was also regarded to be one of the greatest preachers in the United States for the past 40 years; a man named the Rev. Fred Craddock, a United Methodist pastor, who even taught “homiletics,” that is “the art of preaching” at the Chandler School of Theology in connection with Emory University in Atlanta.

He spoke of a time when he was in Dallas, Texas on a Sunday morning and worshipped at the church nearest his hotel. The pastor wrote of his experience: “It turned out to be one of those rare, glorious experiences when the hymns, the anthem, the Scripture readings, the sermon, the prayers and the fellowship—all combined—blessed me very richly! The chemistry was just right the pastor’s sermon really spoke to my need! After the benediction, I stood in the pew where I was, and a man in the pew just in front of me turned around and said to me, “Do you think Tom Landry is going to coach anymore?” At that time Tom Landry was the famous head coach of the Dallas Cowboys.

“In other words,” Fred Craddock continued, *“This man was saying to me, ‘My shoes are red!’”*

Today we rejoice that who baptized members of Mount Olive Lutheran Church will be confirmed into their faith and into the Evangelical Lutheran Church! They are here today—not only because the Word of God was spoken to them, throughout all the years they were in Sunday school and in the past two years in their catechism classes, even as they were baptized years ago. **But they are here—so they can tell us through their very own lips—that this faith into which they were baptized is a faith they fully embrace and want to practice all the days of their lives!**

Years ago, there was an **old CORNFLAKES** commercial on television that was very popular that contained this slogan: **“Try them again for the very first time!”**

James and Charles this is something I am hoping for you today, and that your whole Church family on this day is hoping for you, and also praying for you—that in some respects, as you come into God’s House to hear his Word, to pray to him, to sing his praises and to receive the blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion, it will be like: You hearing them and tasting of the for the very first time!”

You know what Jesus says, **“Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life!” Amen**