

<sup>28</sup> After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup> As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, <sup>30</sup> “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. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’ ” <sup>32</sup> Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup> They replied, “The Lord needs it.” <sup>35</sup> They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> 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: <sup>38</sup> “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” <sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” <sup>40</sup> “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

What is Christianity all about? There was a time when it surprised me to read that most people think Christianity is all about how to be a good person. It still surprises me to hear people say that all religions are the same. In our time many dismiss all religion. They tell us that all religions are about power, making rules to exercise power and defining words to defend that power. “They’re all about morality; the only difference is in the rules.”

What is the Gospel? How should we answer in our time? The Gospel is the good news of forgiveness, of eternal life, of salvation, of grace, yes, the good news of Jesus.

There are just a handful of times that Matthew, Mark and Luke refer to the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus proclaimed, “Repent for the kingdom of God is near!” That may strike us as a stern message of law. The Good News of the Kingdom of God... Doesn’t that sound like any other religious claim of power? “God is in charge. You need to obey his rules.” Should we find a different way to say it?

Why bring that potentially confusing phrase into our celebration of Palm Sunday? Do I really want to ask,

### **What Is the Good News of the Kingdom?**

I think that this question can help us to make the point that Palm Sunday is the celebration of a different kind of kingdom, because Jesus is a different kind of king.

There is a reason why people find this confusing, a Biblical reason. We confess that we came into this world spiritually blind. So it should surprise us that the world doesn’t see, in fact, can’t see anything different?

Why can’t they see the difference? The crucial difference is something only made evident by the Gospel. Those living in the dominion of darkness cannot see that there is a kingdom of light.

Is Christianity all about power? “Here are the rules to approach the King!” No, Palm Sunday is the story of the King who came down to us, who hid his glory, who came near. The Gospel is not just the declaration that he’s in charge. The Gospel reveals how he rules. And how Jesus rules... is good news!

We don’t know how many times Jesus entered Jerusalem in his 33 years. We do know that only once did he enter this way, with this kind of attention. Palm Sunday stirred up the whole city, so that everyone knew something had happened, so that they asked, “Who is this?”

There is glory in the story of Palm Sunday. Jesus is welcomed as a king, as the Son of David, Israel’s glorious king. He is praised for his miracles. They waved palm branches, because they were a symbol for victory. There’s glory here, given joyfully to Jesus.

But there are things that would strike us as so out of place, ...if not for the fact that Zechariah had prophesied this entrance. The king has to borrow an animal to ride. Did he have no friends from whom he could have borrowed a war horse, which would have lifted him above the crowd? He chose an untrained, lowly donkey. No saddle, so the disciples put their cloaks on the donkey and helped Jesus mount up.

You cannot find another story of Jesus making this kind of entrance, of Jesus stirring up a crowd. Earlier in his ministry he hid from this kind of reception. But this day this praise must be heard. **“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”**

<sup>39</sup> **Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”** They met the celebration with indignation. **“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”** There had to be the sound of joyful celebration.

The Pharisees and the people of Jerusalem needed to hear that noise almost more than his disciples. We can make the case that all this noise was really meant for them, to get their attention. That’s seen in what follows. The story of Jesus’ triumphant entrance is, in fact, incomplete without what comes next:

- <sup>41</sup> **As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it <sup>42</sup> and said,**
- **“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. This day was special beyond their understanding, but they refused to see it.**
- Destruction lies ahead for Jerusalem. What did they miss? Jesus tells them, judgment will come **because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”**

Other religious systems are about reaching up to God through morality or speculation or mystery. Christianity is about the One who came down. No, they did not recognize their king. He wasn’t glorious enough. He wasn’t leading in the right direction. He was threatening their authority. They did not see God coming to them.

Jesus wept over the city, but he would not let their blindness turn him from his path. He continued on after this crowd of joyful pilgrims had disappeared. He passes through a different crowd, not riding a donkey but carrying a cross. A cross that would carry the message: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. His enemies found that laughable. He claims to be a king. Only one realized he was in the presence of a king. There can be no doubt but that Jesus’ promise gave him peace.

The Gospel enables us to see the good news in how this King rules. He humbles himself and dies the death we deserved for our rebellion. What he wants for us is good! Good without exception.

That’s what we celebrate. This is our King! See how far his love will go for us!

Our celebration is not complete if we stop there. What this King wants for you is good. So, most certainly, what he wants from you is good. What he wants from me is good. Our king says, “Will you serve me?” Love me with all that you are. Love your neighbor as yourself. Be kind, compassionate. Forgive one another as I have forgiven you. You are familiar with the voice that says that what God wants is foolish, dangerous, unnecessary... Learn to stop and say, “But that is the voice of my gracious King!”

Worshiping Jesus may not look all that glorious, but he treasured the praise of that crowd of disciples. Matthew’s Gospel tells us that when Jesus cleansed the temple, the chief priests and teachers of the law were, once again, indignant, because the children were shouting. **Hosanna to the Son of David!** ...Do you hear what these children are saying? “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, “ ‘From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise?’” In Jesus’ ears that was precious praise.

Your joyful praise has an importance beyond what we realize. Your life, too. Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom because you know that Christ is the King.