

Talking Points “Just Around the Corner” by A J Johnson Delivered 03 28 21

Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm 31:9-16; Phil 2:5-11; and Mark 11:1-11 (Sermon)

And on this blessed and bright Palm Sunday we come to the people shouting “hosanna in the Highest” as the scripture reminds us of what was, and what should happen in our hearts always.

What a familiar story.

What comfort there is in finding the familiar of this holy season! In a year when so much has changed in our lives, there is something comforting and exciting about a return to what is tradition.

It is a joyous event that we re-read with new eyes as we comet to a collective end to the restrictions of the pandemic has brought us through.

With new eyes we discover once again the faithful God in the person of the savior, Jesus Christ who arrives just as he promised ready to

become the “Once and For All” sacrifice for the sins of the world that was foretold by the prophets of old.

The image of the faithful God riding into a crowd of adoration, while we know that in just a few short verses and chapters, in just little under a week, this same crowd that cheers Him, will be the same crowd that calls “crucify Him!!”

What a fickle humanity we are.

How quickly we receive what God sends for us and then turn our backs on the goodness of God as though God and His gifts were nothing to us at all.

That is the great paradox that shouts to us year after year.

Will we be faithful to the King who rides in on a donkey and who exits this week of palms and passion on Friday upon a cross, ready to die for the likes of us?

Our story this morning opens for us as Jesus and His disciples approach Jerusalem and Bethphage and Bethany at the Mt of Olives.

Upon arriving at the location, Jesus foretells what they will find and tells them what they must do.

Securing “a colt that has never been ridden” in verse 2 Mark harkens back to Numbers 19:2 when God instructs Moses and Aaron to bring forth a red calf, a beast, an unyoked beast that is consecrated specifically for God’s use.

Consecrated, set apart, just as that sacrifice was asked to be in Numbers 19, is what the donkey fulfills.

A beast that has not to be used for any reason other than the service of God.

What a wonderful honor for a little lowly donkey.

What a wonderful part to play in the story of this Passion week.

Each person in this familiar scripture plays a part that pictures together a magnificent picture of glory and honor due the King of Kings.

The scripture says that just as Jesus foretells, they find a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway.

Of course, people milling about recognized something going on as they see strangers untying the little colt.

It would have been as if someone suddenly came up to your car around your neighbors, the stranger produces a key to your vehicle.

Of course your neighbors will inquire 'what are you doing with my neighbor's vehicle?'

After all, you need your car, so you can get back and forth to work and earn a living. Your transportation costs a lot of money, and your neighbors know this.

And these strangers know the owner of this colt needs this little beast of burden

But the disciples 'produce the right key' by simply saying the words that Jesus told them to say and then the little colt is now in their possession for the use of Jesus.

And Jesus, the ultimate King of Kings, rides in like a king.

Instead of fine cloth for a saddle, the people threw down their cloaks and coats over the colt so just like a king, Jesus would not be soiled by the sweat and the odor and the fur of the little beast.

Christ comes riding in like the king He is!

And the people become so frenzied with excitement that they rip palm branches off the tree and wave them about feverously

All the while shouting the words that have become so familiar to us
“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Perhaps this was more of a general proclamation. We understand the Christ at the center to be the One who deserves all the adulation, so perhaps we read it not so much as general but specific because of the relationship we have with the text and the savior.

We enter this story, more like the excited disciples, who must have felt joy for others to recognize and celebrate the one whom they had been following for so long.

They had watched Jesus perform miracles.

They had seen as Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead

They had been the witnesses as Jesus healed the sick, made the lame walk, and the blind to see!

Finally! The people's response was at last worthy of their Master.

What an odd sight this must have been.

Jesus, the ruler of the universe, moving among the adulation of the masses, riding not a chariot, although He commands an army of angels.

But in place of military conquest , Jesus is bringing His ministry of peace (Mark 4:39; 5:34; 9:50).

Jesus, the High and Lofty One, who left His throne in heaven, to ride astride a common beast.

Yet, we know something that the towns people and the disciples didn't know.

We know that after the adulation and the jubilation, the horror of Good Friday is just around the corner.

We knew what Isaiah foretold, foretold as beautifully as though it were coming from the mouth of Messiah Himself.

"I offered my backs to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting"

Isaiah 50:6

We know what the crowd did not know. That the Psalmist foretold "I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body in grief."

We know that in the midst of the brightness of adulation, the darkness of Good Friday and the place of the skull, “Golgotha” is just around the corner.

And that’s why verse 11 stands out so.

Verse 11 of Mark 11, “Jesus entered Jerusalem and when into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.”

This is not an idle notation, because there are no idle comments in the scriptures.

God doesn’t waste anything.

What Jesus does and doesn’t do is important here.

What Jesus did not do. He did not remain in the moment of glory and group happiness.

He did not remain in the happy moment and demand more.

He knew just like we do, that Good Friday was just around the corner, and He moved right towards it.

That is striking. He knew that He was going to be punished for sins and crimes that He was not guilty of, but He marched right towards His mission.

In the moment He thinks not of Himself and lingering in the aura of the festival, but He moves straight toward tomorrow.

And Jesus pauses on His march toward His mission, His mission to die for the sins of mankind and bring a redeemed humanity to Himself.

Jesus first enters the temple courts. He looks around at everything in the temple courts, and leaves.

Jesus looks around the temple courts and the scripture does not note that there was anything to write down here.

Jesus stepped into the Temple courts and not one person in the holy place, the place set aside for worship noticed that Christ, the God of their worship, had come into their midst.

Way back during Advent, we read the account of Simeon, the devout man of Jerusalem who according to Luke 2:25-35 met Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus as they entered the Temple to fulfill the requirements of the Law of Moses on the 40th day from Jesus birth.

Though Christ was but an infant, Simeon recognized that the Jesus he had longed for, worshipped and prayed for had entered the place of worship.

So in-tuned was Simeon to the presence of God that Simeon that the Spirit of God was poured out on him and Simeon knew the presence of Jesus.

At advent we also read about Anna, the devout widow who was the 84 year old widow who was constantly worshipping at the Temple. Her faithfulness was blessed with the privilege to see the young Jesus and bear witness about him during this same visit in the temple, even though Jesus was just an infant.

True worshippers recognized Jesus when He enters into the temple.

Mark records that Christ enters into the Temple courts looks around and leaves.

He looks around and our gospel writer of the morning didn't find anything to note or write down here.

Not one person ran up to Him recognizing that the Christ was in their midst.

It begs the questions

If Jesus walked in our midst would we recognize Him?

Could we spot Jesus in the crowd?

Would we be so vacant of recognition that we would shout hosanna one day and 'crucify him the next?'

On this Palm Sunday towards the end of pandemic, we are asked a very simple question unique to our pandemic circumstances, but not so unique after all?

When Jesus looks at us, and peers into our hearts will He find a sanctuary ready to receive Him, or will He find our hearts filled with empty, fickle praise?

Will He find us yearning for Him with a desire true relationship with Him?

Will we recognize Him and stay faithful to His side?

As we come to the beginning of the end of what has been the longest season in many of our lives, what will Jesus find when He comes to us?

Do we praise Him for a moment or live a lifestyle of worship and dedication?

I encourage each of us to prepare our hearts on this Palm Sunday and to make a new promise in our hearts to worship God more fully than we ever have before.

As we emerge from our pandemic, may we not be ones that praise the Lord for deliverance and then not continue to stay close to the throne of Christ.

Many will praise Him for the vaccine, and a return to normalcy. Let us be the ones who have a consistent lifestyle of praise and joy unto God.

Amen.