

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

Sermon: Which Parade Will You Follow?

Taped for Palm Sunday 2020 – VHUMC

SCRIPTURE VIDEO – MATTHEW 21-11

Hosanna cried the people on that Palm Sunday so long ago when Jesus rode into the city. “Save us, save us now.” And he did, but what was he saving us for? Eternal life, of course, but could there be more? Hold onto to that question because we will circle back to it. Here is my Palm Sunday pop quiz question for all of you. **Did you know there were two parades into Jerusalem that day?**

Now one of those parades is so familiar that we can see it in our mind’s eye. As Jesus approaches the city coming down from the Mount of Olives and up to Jerusalem, this spontaneous parade erupts. No one was singing “Celebrate” by Kool and the Gang, but they should have been. The people rushed to line the streets and they began to cheer. They cut palm branches down to cover the road in front of Jesus. Some even put their coats down in the dust of the road. The dads put their kids on their shoulders so they could get a bird’s eye view of all the excitement. The Shriners were there riding those tiny motorcycles in and around the disciples. Okay, I mad that part up, but they should have been there. You see this was no ordinary parade. This is the parade the Jewish people had been waiting for so long! You already know what they yelled as Jesus rode past them.

Remember their words: **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”** This is not aimless cheering; these are dangerous words. These are the kind of words that can get you crucified. The crowd is comparing Jesus to King David, the greatest king that Israel has ever known. That is a political statement. The crowd says Jesus’ authority and power comes from God and not political or religious institutions. That is a theological statement. And then the crowd shouts “Hosanna” which means “save us, save us now.” That is the most dangerous

statement of all; the people are making a statement of faith. The people believe in Jesus and they have declared Jesus as King; no wonder they cheered him.

Jesus came from the east, but Pontus Pilate, the Roman governor, came into Jerusalem from the western side entering the city on a warhorse at the head of a full legion of Roman soldiers, 5,000 strong, the finest fighting men the world had ever seen. Pilate had come from his palace in Caesarea Maritima for the sole purpose of maintaining law and order during the Jewish Passover. The Jews never accepted Roman rule and the Romans always feared a rebellion especially when the city was packed with pilgrims from around the known world to celebrate Passover.

Two parades on the same day, yet so different. No one sang or danced or waved palm branches when Pilate marched into the city. In fact, the only reason there were people standing by the side of the road was coercion. The Roman soldiers stationed in Jerusalem would go out before his arrival and force Jewish citizens to stand by the side of the road. They could force them to stand, but they could not force them to sing or dance or wave palm branches because Pilate was no Messiah and they knew it.

No wonder the people loved Jesus' parade. They had waited so long and now the One who would save them had arrived. But the good news of Palm Sunday is not limited to a single moment in time. Today on this Palm Sunday we also celebrate that Jesus has finally arrived. He has shown up once again to save us and we all need some saving today, don't we?

Do we need saving from our sins? Of course, we do, but there is more. We need saving from the current world pandemic, the first since 1918. We need saving from our fears, our confusion, our worry, our sleepless nights, and this constant low-grade anxiety over a virus that cannot even be seen by the human eye. We need saving from days at home that seem to stretch on forever. How many movies can we watch? How many board games can we play? We need saving; people always have, and people always will. No wonder the people cheered and danced so long ago and no wonder this sanctuary is usually filled with palm branches and a noisy parade of children. The King of Kings, the Lord of

Lords, the Messiah has ridden into the city of Vestavia Hills once again and he is here to save us.

We know Jesus is here to save us from sin and death, but now let's circle back to my first question. What is Jesus saving us for? They say a picture is worth 1,000 words and in this case they are correct.

SLIDE – PHOTO OF “HOW CAN WE HELP” COVID-19 SIGN WITH THE PURPLE DRAPED CROSS IN THE BACKGROUND

Jesus is saving us, his church, for such a time as this. Amid our own fear, worry, and anxiety we will continue to do the work of Christ. The question on our church signs around the city say it all: “How can we help?” **And the power that fuels that question can only be seen in the cross behind the sign.** Our food pantry continued to feed people by packing food while wearing surgical gloves and using a drive-through pick up system. Who knew there could be people as the gloved hands of Christ in the world? Our Sunday School classes stand ready to deliver groceries or prescriptions and other needs that may arise. We stay connected to one another through on-line worship and bible studies and our children and student ministries are doing the same. **You see Jesus is always ready to save us from and to save us for.**

But there is one more Palm Sunday question to consider. There were two parades in Jerusalem on that day so long ago. One had the power and might of a Rome that ruled the world at the point of a sword and the nails on a cross. The other parade was led by a wandering rabbi riding on a donkey with shouts of hosannas from the people. Yet those same people were shouting “Crucify him” by the end of the week.

My friends, Jesus came as a servant seeking to save us by building a kingdom in our hearts and lives, a kingdom of truth, of healing, of goodness, of mercy, hope, and grace. **So here is your final Palm Sunday question: which parade will you follow, and will you follow it all the way to the cross? Amen.**