

## A Song of Victory

### Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord 's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.

The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

## Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

### Mark Chapter 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.' " They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.

Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

The big day has arrived! Jesus is finally going to make his triumphal entry into Jerusalem – the center of power for Israel!

This is how people envisioned their warrior king to be. This is how the world always envisions its leaders to be – glorious, decisive! And – as I mentioned last week – that is how we want our Lord and God to be. But if we go through our scriptures, we find that the leaders that God sends us are rarely the ones the people expected and wanted.

Beginning with Joseph – sold into slavery by his brothers. God blessed him in Egypt and Joseph ended up saving his people from famine.

Moses – the stuttering, shepherd who God used to set his people free from slavery in Egypt.

Another shepherd – this time a young boy named David, who later became Israel's greatest king chosen by God.

John the Baptist, cousin to Jesus, who was a voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!"

By looking at them, none of these boys and men are the kind of leaders that people would want.

The Gospel of Mark is filled with irony in this part of chapter 11 beginning with Jesus choosing a lowly, donkey as his mode of transportation for his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. By glancing at this story there appears to be very little that is triumphant. But as we dig deeper into the story, we begin to

see the references to Old Testament accounts of the triumphant king entering Jerusalem.

These are the Old Testament references that Mark describes in this short passage. Beginning with verse 1, where Jesus approaches Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. In Zechariah 14:4 it says...

[Zech. 14:4]

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward.

In Jewish tradition, this is the place where the triumphal entry of the new messianic ruler of the city will start.

If we go to Zechariah 9:9 it reads,

[Zech. 9:9]

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter 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.

And in 2 Kings 9:13 we read,

[2 Kings 9:13]

Then hurriedly they all took their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, "Jehu is king."

What we find Mark doing is drawing a parallel between the Messianic warrior-king prophecies and that of Jesus – the Messianic Prince of Peace.

Yes, the people wanted a Jesus who would be their king who would rid the land of the Roman Empire. But Jesus was a smart, politically savvy man. He knew what would happen if he rode into the city on a white horse. The Romans would arrest him and execute him immediately, as they did to anyone who posed a threat to the empire. Jesus foretold the people what would happen if the people rebelled and when they did several decades later – the Romans leveled the temple and crucified thousands of people.

By choosing the donkey, Jesus is signaling to his disciples and others who are following him that he is not the kind of Messiah that they expected. And this eventually is what leads the people – perhaps the same people praising him during his arrival – to later reject him. At his arrival the people surely see it as a blessing to the people of Jerusalem, and as a holy place, Jesus too will be blessed by the association.

However, as the week progresses nothing could be farther removed from the events that actually follow. In his interaction with the authorities, he undermines their authority and teaching. The parable of the wicked tenants blatantly threatens the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He accuses the Sadducees of ignorance of both the scriptures and God's power. Finally, he predicts the destruction of the Temple itself.

Jesus turns out to be a very testy visitor. Like the house guest who seems pleasant enough at a distance but whose long-anticipated stay finds nothing that pleases, nothing that even remotely satisfies, Jesus quickly wears out his welcome. As modern Christians, we're use to reading the gospels with antipathy toward the fickle crowds and especially toward the authorities. But if we look at it from their perspective - they roll out the red carpet, only to discover that Jesus has come into town to attack all that they prize. They desire the genial guest, the teacher who will say what they want to hear and in ways that are pretty and soothing. The "kingdom" they prepare to receive in Mark 11:10 is not a kingdom for which they are prepared. As Christ's present day disciples, we must ask ourselves if we are prepared.

Christian author, Thomas Long, reminds us that it is right at this place that Mark imparts some of his best theological wisdom. He makes it clear, by his description of the disciples' activity in his Gospel, that the way to "prepare the way of the Lord" is not

by becoming a member of the Knights Templar and gallantly defending Christendom, but rather by performing humble and routine tasks. The disciples in Mark get a boat ready for Jesus, find out how much food is on hand for the multitude, secure the room and prepare the table for the Last Supper and, of course, chase down a donkey that the Lord needs to enter Jerusalem. Whatever they may have heard when Jesus said, “Follow me,” it has led them into a ministry of handling the day-to-day details of life.

In Mark, the Twelve are sent out to proclaim the gospel, cast out demons, heal the sick and exercise authority. But Mark wants us to know that what this looks like is often a matter of speaking a quiet word in a committee meeting, spending time with someone who is incoherent and coming apart at the seams, emptying a bedpan at the hospital and typing a few desperate, halting words on a laptop when getting ready for Sunday’s sermon.

In Mark’s world, “preparing the way of the Lord” usually looks like standing hip-deep in the mire of some stable trying to corral a donkey for Jesus.

Pastor Ayanna Johnson Watkins wrote of a popular myth about the building of Solomon’s Temple. It says the stones used to build it were cut at a different location and then shipped to the building site. The cornerstone happened to be shipped unmarked, and for a long while, no one knew what the piece

was for or where it belonged. Later, the lead builder asked the stone makers when they would send the cornerstone. Of course, they'd already sent it, and when the builders went looking for it, they found it in a field—grown over by a jungle of weeds, tossed aside, rejected.

Sometimes we just don't know what we're dealing with. One day Jesus is being celebrated, honored, seen as the saving king of Israel. A few days later, he is arrested, beaten, and crucified. The people think their chief cornerstone should look different than this guy, be tougher and probably taller.

How often have we missed God and God's doings because they showed up unmarked? I pray this Palm Sunday finds us keeping an eye out for other rejected stones. Who knows? They may be exactly the ones holding us together. Amen.