

**Sunday, March 28, 2021**

**Sermon: Is Jesus the Messiah You Are Looking For?**

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*It's Palm Sunday! Today at worship we will discover why Jesus might disappoint us. And because of that, he shows us the way to the God of Love. Happy Palm Sunday! God loves you!*

We've talked a little bit about the word "hosanna" and how it means to save us from ourselves, save us from our own hatred, our own animosity from ourselves and towards one another. Jesus teaches us that the commandments all boil down to this - love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself. Mark 11:1-11.

What that essentially means is that if you are using any religious laws in order to harm, condemn, or exclude others, then according to Jesus you're doing religion wrong. Larry said earlier today that one of the great tragedies of Christianity is how it has been used as a weapon against our LGBTQIA siblings. And particularly as we come into Wednesday and Transgender Day of Visibility, how Christianity has been used as a weapon against those of us who are transgender. We are working for the end of using religion as a weapon against anyone including our transgender siblings. I bring this up to you because this is what I think is the heart of Palm Sunday. Moving away from using violence, exclusion, anger, and hostility no matter how we justify it and moving towards living into God's love for everyone, including - this is the most difficult part for me and maybe for you, too - including those that we call our enemies.

Now you may be wondering what is the deal with palms. Why is it Palm Sunday? Well, in one of the gospel accounts it says that they had specifically palm branches that they waved as Jesus rode this colt, this young horse, into Jerusalem. They waved the palm branches. There is so much going on in this passage. I want to talk with you about a few of those things. What is the deal with the palm branches? Palm branches are an ancient symbol, throughout the ancient middle east, of goodness but also of victory. And this isn't just any kind of victory, this is military victory. Palm branches were a symbol of strength, a symbol of military conquest, and also a symbol of goodness. Those two combined together in this symbol of the palm branch. King Solomon had the temple built. King Solomon put a symbol of the palm branch on the door, a symbol of military victory.

So Jesus enters into Jerusalem with people waving these palm branches at him. Maybe they're expecting Jesus to be a messiah like the messiahs of the past. Maybe they are expecting the palm branches to inspire Jesus to lead them in a military victory over their roman occupiers. Jesus comes in riding on a colt, which is a young horse. In our passage from Mark today, Jesus makes sure that the disciples who go and get the colt know that they are to get a colt that has never been ridden before. Why? Because this young horse has not been trained in the ways of military strength over others. This young baby of a horse has not been corrupted by violence. This young baby horse is not a military horse. Why? Because Jesus is trying to save us, hosanna save us, from our own violence, from our own hatred. Save us from the ways in which we have tragically heard of the church bombing today, I think it was in Indonesia, save us from using violence against ourselves and against our fellow human beings. Save us. Jesus knows what we need to be saved from. It is our own violence. It is our own ways that we demonize and harm one another.

This may disappoint many of us. Jesus is not coming to defeat or conquer our enemies. Jesus is not coming to do that. Jesus is coming to be radically different. Jesus is coming to teach us the ways of love. I don't want you to get the wrong impression because Jesus gets this from his Jewish tradition.

You see, there are two strands that run throughout the Bible. One of them, the prophet Hosea, puts it perfectly. He says that God desires mercy, not sacrifice. God desires steadfast love, not sacrifice. Jesus lives this steadfast love, this mercy, out in his life.

Psalm chapter 20 says now I know that the Lord will help his anointed. He will answer him with his Holy Heaven, with mighty victories by his right hand. Here's how the victory is going to happen. Some take pride in chariots and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God. Do you see that subversion that is happening in the Bible in this psalm? God will give Jesus victory. God will give victory but not through chariots and horses, not through military might over and against others. Why? Because we're not trusting in chariots and horses, we're trusting in God, the one who desires steadfast love and not sacrificing other people.

Zechariah chapter 9 verses 9-10 says to rejoice greatly o'daughter Zion. Shout aloud oh daughter Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you triumphant and victorious is he. And here is where you ask how is the King triumphant and victorious? Humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Riding on a baby horse or a baby donkey, not a war horse. It says he will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, from Israel and the war horse from Jerusalem and the battle though shall be cut off and he shall command peace to the nations, his dominion, shall be from sea to sea.

This is the ancient Jewish mind that is subverting all human violence by saying if you are stuck in the ways of violence, you are missing the point. You're not trusting in God, you're trusting in military horses and chariots and thus tragically you've missed the whole point. And how do we as Christians know this? Because Jesus lives it out in his life. We know this precisely because of Palm Sunday where the symbol of military victory, the palm branches right behind me, gets subverted. We're not doing that anymore says Jesus. You're gonna follow me. As we enter and go through Holy Week it may take us through Good Friday, it may take us to the cross. God's love in a violent world where we challenge the violent systems and show it a different way of radical love and non-violence may take us through some suffering. It took Jesus to the cross but the cross doesn't have the last word. God's love has the last word. That is what Easter is about.

So what does all of this ancient history, this ancient spirituality, have to say to us. What are the ways in which our nation which many claim to be a Christian nation how are the ways that we have failed to see the point that Jesus brought to us. How are the ways in which we have claimed to be the followers of the messiah who rides in on not a war horse, not a chariot, but on a baby colt that hasn't been trained for war. The messiah who brings us into not God's non-violent love. How have we possibly as a nation missed this.

Did you know that the United States has 800 military bases throughout the world? 800 military bases. That's an empire. That is the threat of violence throughout the world. Jesus shows us a different way. 800 military bases. Do you know how many military bases Russia has throughout the world? 21.

How much is enough? The United States outspends every other country in the world in military spending. We outspend the next 10 countries combined. How much is enough? And how much of all of those taxes that you and I pay could be used to help people. During this time of Covid we've discovered that maybe our greatest threat doesn't come from militaries on the other side of the world, maybe our greatest threat comes from disease, maybe our greatest threat comes from not having drinkable water throughout the United States. Maybe our biggest threat comes from children throughout the United States who are homeless and can't eat and are starving to death. Maybe our greatest threat comes from the fact that we haven't had a wage increase here in the United States in the last 30 years. Maybe those are our greatest threats and yet we continue to funnel money into the military industrial complex.

I'm going to finish up here I know I'm running long. But I want you to know there are three primary reasons that the military industrial complex, the industries that lead to our military creating all of these weapons and these drones, three main reasons that these are almost controlling our country. And that is because these weapon manufacturers, the companies who make these weapons, can only make money when a nation is at war or planning to go to war. And so they do their best to make sure that we are at war. Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Boeing all want us to stay in war so that they can make more and more money. The second problem is Congress. Congress, congressional candidates, need money and they can get money, big money, from military industries. So they have an incentive to be at war too so that they can get more and more money. The third issue is the Defense Department who wants to increase its budget to grow in prestige and it needs war or the threat of war.

We've been at war for the last 95% of American history we've been in some kind of violent war or conflict. The Defense Department needs us to be at war or at some threat of war so that it can continue to get money, taxes that you and I pay. These are big, big problems. These should be big, big problems for those of us who are Christians as we follow the Prince of Peace, the one who says that the way to peace is through peaceful means. The one who confronts the powers and principalities of his day, who goes to the temple and shuts it down because it has become corrupt by the way of power and violence over and against others, by not caring for the needs of the poor.

The message of Palm Sunday is hosanna save us from our own hatred, our own selves. Save us from participating in violent structures in the world. Save us from our own nation. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem because it refuses to listen to his cry. Maybe Jesus weeps over Washington DC, weeps over the United States for refusing to hear the call that violence is not the answer, that God's love is the answer.

So friends, may we continue during this Holy Week to follow the Prince of Peace, to take risks, to know that you are loved and that suffering and violence and death do not have the last word. Easter is coming my friends. Easter is coming. May you know that you are loved now and forever. Amen