

The Pathway

Palm Sunday

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Mark 11: 1-11

Luke 22:14 - 20

March 28, 2021

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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.

Mark 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.

Sucked dry orange peels tossed aside, thousands of tiny crushed Dixie cups, abandoned gloves and caps, dirty, torn and trampled-on poster board signs of encouragement, and forgotten water bottles all line the Marathon route from Hopkinton to Boston once the runners and the TV cameras have passed through. All the items are cast aside remnants of a very special day, a special event and annual celebration. Just a few hours ago there were half a million spectators along each step of these 26.2 miles handing out groves of freshly cut oranges and endless cups of

water to the 30,000 race participants, and cheering on each racer with bold, bright and encouraging signs and applause and cheers. From the blue and gold start line in Hopkinton, through eight towns and cities, on flat roads, down hills, up hills, including one that is heartbreaking, people ran and raced for the sense of accomplishment, some for charity, some as a long sought dream. There was excitement, magic, and awe in the air. For those who participated it is the culmination of months, years, of training and determination, and for some of the spectators there was a fleeting sense of wanting to participate next year, an oversized assumption and fantasy of the possibility.

The Boston Marathon is a grand parade of athleticism, of community, of literally welcoming the world to a few suburban towns and a major city for competition for fun, for a truly special, beloved and celebrated event. There are so many runners and spectators that the route towns have their population doubled as the racers cross the ‘welcome to’ signs.

It is a day of success for some, and for others a day of failure. It is a day of plans, dreams, hopes and wishes.

The parade we remember today is also a long awaited day of plans, dreams, hopes and wishes. Enormous crowds have made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover as the population of the city grew five times over, and now they were here to greet, to welcome, the Messiah, whose triumphal entry into Jerusalem is humbly on the back of a young donkey. In festive gaiety cloaks were strewn over the rough road, and fresh green palms were waved in joyful celebration and adoration of this long awaited Messiah who would overthrow the burden and oppression of the Roman empire. The crowds cheered, they waved their palms to protest, and to celebrate.

The parade we remember today, the palms we wave today, mark for us the beginning of Holy Week. Over the next few days Jesus will overturn the tables of the moneychangers in the temple who dared to transform a house of prayer into a den of robbers, he will curse fig trees which do not bear fruit, he will have his authority questioned and doubted, he will teach the great commandment, he will foretell the destruction of the temple, he will teach us all to remember him in the breaking of the bread and in the cup of blessing, he will be the rejected chief cornerstone as he is betrayed, beaten, crucified, and buried and then will ultimately rise in glorious resurrection. We cannot be at the parade today and not be mindful of this, we cannot celebrate the triumphal entry without acknowledging the unrelenting shadows of the days ahead. We know just who this Jesus was who came to Jerusalem for Passover and was greeted with a festive parade, we know that he was the Son of God in human form sent for us.

For those who lined the road with their cloaks and waved their palms, the parade we remember today is a very different parade, and it was not the only one in town. Jesus came into Jerusalem from the north as a grander and more spectacular parade came into Jerusalem from the west. In their book, *‘The Last Week,’* New Testament scholars John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg, tell of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate coming from his home in Caesarea by the sea to put on a display of force to the crowd of devout Jews gathering for Passover, gathering to commemorate their liberation from their Egyptian oppressors. Pilate and his army want it to be clear that there will not be any liberation from the Imperial Romans powers. History will not repeat itself. God’s redemption will not be allowed to happen again. Each year during Passover the Roman governor moved his headquarters to Jerusalem as a show of strength to prevent any outbreaks of insurgency or violent rebellion against Roman rule. The move included a parade of power, of “cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold.” While shouts of “Hosanna” went to Jesus’ parade, those seeing this parade of Pilate’s military force were subdued. Hope, dreams and

wishes this particular Passover were that the Messiah had arrived to free the people in no less grand and dramatic fashion than God had freed them from the Egyptians.

Two very different parades, two very different pathways, happened that day in Jerusalem. The one that had welcomed and celebrated Jesus' arrival was soon littered with dried, torn, crushed palm leaves and filthy cloaks that had been trampled on by the crowds. The cheering crowds had gone home, gone away crushed and disappointed. There was silence where angelic armies had been expected. Redemption had not come in the way they had hoped, they had expected. The same crowd will soon turn on him, they will turn on him for not being who they assumed him to be. In just days their shouts of 'Hosanna,' will instead be 'Crucify him!'

Two very different pathways, one to crucifixion and resurrection that cannot yet be seen by them. The other pathway is to the status quo, to what is hated, feared and despised, yet known and familiar. Following Pilates' parade was at least self-protection against punishment for rabble-rousing, for treason. Without release from Roman rule by this man claiming to be the Messiah, the hopes of the crowd are now as tattered and frayed as the dirty cloaks and ragged palms.

We who know what will happen in Holy Week are reminded of how we can be distracted and fooled by fancier, flashier parades. We can join the parade that is brighter, louder, and does not call us to turn the other cheek, to welcome all of God's beloved children, to love as steadfastly as God loves. We can take the easy way out on the bandwagon or we can follow the path of cloaks and palms that leads to Golgotha and finally resurrection, following the path of One who calls us to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

What will we leave littered behind on the pathway on this day that the Lord has made and in which we rejoice? Will we leave behind our doubts and insecurities that suck us dry, our ways that inevitably crush us and keep us from following the way of Jesus? Today we stand at the starting line of a week in which Jesus will suffer, and say, "It is finished," as it all really begins. Amen.