Palm2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

*“Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”*

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Many today call the upcoming week "Passion week". In fact I heard that phrase on the radio in a pastor's little sermonette. It seems the more Protestant side of the Christian spectrum uses "Passion week" while the more Catholic call it "Holy week". For us last week was Passion week. Passion**tide** is composed of Passion week and the first half of Holy Week ending on Maundy Thursday evening. Traditionally the Glory Be is **no**t recited during this short period.

Thursday at even we leave Lent and enter the ancient season of *Triduum*, meaning three days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Today begins the commemoration of Jesus' final few days alive on earth before his crucifixion.

This is the "Sunday next before Easter", as our 1928 Prayer Book officially and awkwardly names it. It reminds me of the equally awkward name for the very last Trinity season Sunday: the "Sunday next before Advent".

Today, of course, is best known by its nickname of "Palm Sunday". On Palm Sunday we get to recall Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His only day on earth when he was welcomed by hoards of people as a king.

But this recollection, from the *King James' Bible*, is only possible today because of the so-called "*Little Liturgy of the Palms*" which is read before blessing them. Recalling Jesus triumphal entry does not appear as the Gospel today but rather on the second Sunday in Advent. (The actual **Gospel** for today-- St. Matthew's-- is the first of the four Passion narratives, and the longest reading of the year. The others are read at the various liturgies during this Holy Week.)

This recollection, from Matthew, of Christ's entry has been used since before the Reformation and is found in our *Missal*. Those of you who remember the 1979 PB will recall that Years using the "B" and "C" lectionary supplied the other recollections of Jesus triumphal entry from Ss. Mark and Luke. St. John's very short recollection (from Chapter 12) of really just three sentences never seems to get read except in daily offices.

Now that first Palm Sunday was a work day, the day after the Sabbath. But Jerusalem was teeming with people and activity because of the approaching great feast of the Passover. Besides its own population of about 80,000, Jewish pilgrims were flocking there from all parts of the Roman Empire. In addition, all men of age who lived within 15 miles were required to go every year.

And of course, Rome was also there. Pontius Pilate the governor had arrived in military pomp from the seaside garrison of Caesarea, almost simultaneously with Jesus I might add, just to show the locals who really was “boss”.

But before coming into town Jesus sent his disciples on a little errand. They were supposed to go to the nearby town of Bethany where Martha, Mary, and Lazarus lived, and get a couple of animals. Matthew's is the only Gospel that mentions a colt, but they all mention the donkey. Jesus obviously had friends there and it seems likely that his phrase, “the master has need of them”, was some sort of password.

**We** would not think of entering anywhere riding upon a donkey as arriving “in style”. Yet, in the Middle East a donkey is not a despised animal, but considered noble.

And the symbolism of Jesus arrival on one was not lost on the Jews. Every king since David had arrived for his coronation riding a donkey, a symbol of peace. The prophet Zechariah also had prophesied that God's anointed one, the Messiah, when he came would arrive into Jerusalem meek and humble... riding on a donkey. Thus, they would have seen Jesus arriving as, in contrast to Rome, an humble, peace loving... **king**.

St. Mark's account, which as I have mentioned in other sermons would have come essentially from Peter's recollections, added that this donkey never had been ridden. While the crowds would not have known this, the symbolism is also important. We might remember last week on "Passion Sunday" the Epistle recalled Yom Kippur (or the Day of Atonement) when the High Priest sacrificed an outwardly perfect, unblemished, red young bull.

To be “perfect” the bull also, as we can read in Deuteronomy and Numbers, must never have been used for anything else, such as plowing. Similarly, we might recall that in First Samuel, when the ark of God is being carried into Jerusalem, it is placed upon a carriage which never has been used before. Thus, WE may see Jesus arrival manifesting the arrival of ...the truly perfect sacrifice.

Upon Jesus arrival the people shouted, “Hosanna!”, or “Save, Now!”. They took Palm branches and threw them along the path, not unlike a flower girl at a wedding.

Palm branches had been strewn on the ground before Judas Maccabeus when he arrived in Jerusalem 200 years earlier to cleanse the Temple after it had been intentionally defiled by the truly wicked Antiochus Epiphanies. (If you have a study Bible which includes the Books *Third and Fourth Maccabees*--coming from the Orthodox church, you can read more of his evil doings in gory detail.)

As ruler of the Greek Seleucid empire that succeeded Alexander the Great he had conquered most of Egypt and tried to extinguish Judaism in ways that would have made Hitler proud. Jesus' symbolism of coming to “clean house” would not have been lost at all on the Great Temple's leaders. And, the very next day, Jesus proceeded to do just that by overturning the moneychangers tables.

The crowds also shouted: “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”. This was the common greeting to pilgrims arriving for Passover. Here, as we shall see, truer words were never spoken. For Jesus, while coming into town for Passover, would celebrate the Passover, but also, as we might say today, “a whole lot more”, in the name of the Lord.

Besides all the symbolism Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem that day displayed, he also displayed actual, real courage. Jesus was known by the authorities and loathed by the powers that be. (Imagine Donald Trump showing up at a National Organization for Women event.)

They really wanted **to kill** Jesus and were scheming to and, of course we know, all their scheming paid off on Good Friday. They even had conspired to try to kill St. Lazarus since so many had turned to Jesus after he raised his friend from four days death.

The Temple leaders feared, among other things, that the commotion caused by this Jesus figure might well lead to Rome crush their unique in the Empire sweetheart arrangement which permitted them not to have to worship either Caesar and Jupiter. This is to what the High Priest Caiaphas was referring when we he said it was better for **one man** to die than for the nation.

Now the worldly wise approach would have been for Jesus either to stay away completely as some of his disciples had urged or to enter Jerusalem quietly and work out a deal with the authorities. Perhaps they would have agreed to let this popular rabbi live by allowing him to be called a great prophet, just not the Messiah.

That approach would have required far less courage, and allowed a “happy ending” with Passover going on as usual and Jesus returning to the sea shore with his friends to work more healings and teach nice platitudes. While probably seen as success for those around Jesus, it would have been failure for **him** and us.

Without his extra-ordinary courage His Passion would not have occurred, and the plan to rescue mankind would have failed. Not just Jesus' courage but his patience would be tested supremely in the days which followed. How could he as a human being have such courage to endure? In short, he was **bless-ed**.

This may sound trite to say that Jesus was bless-ed since he was God's son. But, we should remember that the proper translation for "blessed" in the NT is "equanimity", perfect harmony. Because Jesus was in **perfect** harmony he had the courage to do God, his Father's, will.

History has been full of Christian saints, martyrs and others, who have displayed incredible endurance and courage to go about the Lord's work. This was brought about by their blessed state of harmony. The key to this state quite simply is faith.

We see this in our own lives. While probably none of us would put himself into the category of the saints, we know that when we believe in the importance and rightness of something that we have extra energy and courage which may shock those around us. We may hear others saying, “well I would have given up on that long ago!” Or, “that sounds impossible” or “don't even bother”. All of these are proclamations by those do **not** believe that a particular action or activity is all that worthwhile in lasting value. Thus, they fail when another would succeed.

Each of us has seen movies and read books about great courage and valor such as display by Medal of Honor winners. Jesus though willingly had agreed to the toughest assignment possible, namely, to come to earth with supernatural powers, knowing that he had those supernatural powers, but only use them to help others, have to read the riot act to the powerful, and then die a violent, painful, shameful death all to save a race of creatures who mostly did not like him his rocking the boat.

Yet, faith is what enables people to do great things. There is much we can do to heighten our faith in Jesus: regular attendance at church, reception of the Seven Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

These along with quiet reflection, prayer, study and reading of the Bible and Christian literature all increase the opportunities for the Holy Spirit to get... through to us. This pretty much guarantees increased faith over time, and with it the “Blessed-ness” that leads to the courage to "follow the example" of Jesus patience as we prayed earlier: in short, to trust him. As our own growth in faith enables us to do more and more for the Lord, we can only pray someday to hear others say as **we** draw nigh them: "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" AMEN.

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