

March 24, 2013  
Questions for Holy Week

*Why Cheer?*  
Mark 11:1-11

**Opening words:** There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not a single one should be wasted. Have you every stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? However, there is one week that changed our world forever, Holy Week! On the Christian calendar Holy Week is the last week of Lent, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending at dawn on Easter. It is the week the church remembers the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry. It recalls the expectations of Palm Sunday, the rejection of Maundy Thursday, the devastation of Good Friday and the final victory of Easter morning. During this Holy Week we will answer the questions that accompany each day.

It is important that you know the events of Palm Sunday are recorded in all four Gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each one of the writers understood the significance of that day. May God give you ears to hear Mark's version, Mark 11:1-11. Let me call this message *Why Cheer?*

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**Mark 11:1-11** <sup>1</sup> As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethpage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>3</sup> If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

<sup>4</sup> They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, <sup>5</sup> some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" <sup>6</sup> They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. <sup>7</sup> When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

<sup>10</sup> "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

<sup>11</sup> Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

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This is Palm Sunday and the camera is set squarely on Jesus. The life that began in the solitude of the manger was now in the eye of the storm. It must have felt like his entire world was there that day. After all, it was Passover and everyone wanted to be in Jerusalem, the Golden City. They came for three reasons. First, they came to remember how God had spared their people generations ago. How could anyone forget the name 'Moses'? Second, they came to make their required sacrifices. It was the fashionable thing to do. Third, they came to see the most important people in their lives. Like our contemporary Thanksgiving and Christmas, it was a time of family and friends. It was a time to get caught up and a time to reminisce. And on the tongue of everyone was the name of this rabbi from Nazareth, Jesus. They had heard the stories.

Everyone knew Jesus was different. He taught with authority. Unlike the teacher and the scribes, he was charismatic. In other words, he taught with power. It was like he was speaking for God. His words were enough, but his actions underscored their meaning. How do you not listen to a man who accepts the rejected? How do you not listen to a man who has the ability to calm the most violent storm? How do you not listen to a man who can make the blind see? How do you not listen to a man who can make the lame walk? How do you not listen to a man who made the demonic whole or the diseased healthy? Everyone knew Jesus was different. However, not everyone accepted Jesus. There were those people who would die for Jesus and those people who wanted him dead. Everyone had an emotional opinion about him and it is for this reason everyone wanted to see him on that first Palm Sunday. With all this background in mind, let us look at the text together.

It was Sunday of Passover week and the crowd was gathering. When Jesus arrived, the crowd went wild. They knew something was going to happen. This evening at Canfield United Methodist I am going to look at the three reasons they cheered. Let me give you a teaser. I will expound on them this evening. First, they cheered because of **sensationalism**. In other words, Jesus was a celebrity. They just had to see him. Second, they cheered because of **selfishness**. They had heard about the miracles and they hoped Jesus had one more left for them. They cheered to get the Master's attention. Third, they cheered because of their **short-sightedness**. They were encouraging Jesus to lead a political revolution. They were tired of being dominated by a foreign land. They were tired of Rome, the taxes and the soldiers. This is the truth: They cheered for all the wrong reasons. I hope we are cheering for the right reasons.

This is the question for this morning. Why do *we* cheer? We cheer for Jesus for three reasons. Let me give them to you up front and unpack them in the next few minutes. I believe you can agree with each one. First, we cheer because Palm Sunday is part of our personal **history**. This is not your first Palm Sunday. What memories do you hold from past Palm Sundays? It is fine to visit the past. You just can't live there. Second, we cheer because Palm Sunday is part of our **heritage**. We cheer because we are connected to that crowd in the Gospel lesson. Third and finally, we cheer because someday we are going to **heaven**, our future home. Palm Sunday started a domino effect that brings us back here next week to celebrate Easter. Each one of those reasons, history, heritage and home, begin with the letter "H." So if you are ready to begin say, "**Hosanna!**"

### **History**

The first reason we cheer is our personal history. What is your first Palm Sunday memory? This is mine. I must have been four years old. I remember standing in the narthex in the back of my home church, Central Christian Church. I was waiting to walk into the sanctuary. I wasn't alone. I was surrounded by the other children of the church. The older children were prepared to walk in first. My class was near the end of the line with our teacher, Rose Parker. She was the only Sunday school teacher I ever

had. (Her red hair came out of a bottle.) I remember my heart pounding. I didn't want to walk in front of the whole church. I knew my parents would be sitting in their usual spot looking for me. At just the right time Rose Parker handed me a palm. I walked into the sanctuary and dropped it at the altar. The entire Sunday school exited through the side doors and headed to Sunday school. I don't remember the lesson. I do remember running back to the altar to retrieve my palm. I used it as a sword and had a wonderful time. That is my story. Can I state the obvious? There is no theology in that story, but it is filled with wonderful personal memories. That is my first memory of Palm Sunday.

What is your first memory of Palm Sunday? One of the reasons we cheer on Palm Sunday is the memories of past Palm Sundays. There is nothing wrong with visiting the past. The problem is you just can't live there. One of the reasons we send the children down the aisle with their palms is that we were sent down the aisle with our palms. We want them to have that experience, but we also want to be reminded of our own history. If you find some truth that statement then say, "**Hosanna!**" First, we cheer on Palm Sunday because of our personal history. Second, we cheer on Palm Sunday because it is part of our heritage.

### **Heritage**

This weekend in Salt Lake City, 7000 people have gathered for one reason, to explore their genealogy. They are part of a convention called "RootsTech." It is sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Mormons. This is the third annual event. It has grown every year. They sponsor the event because they believe the family connection is important. It is important to be connected with your family, both the living and the dead. You don't have to be Mormon to attend. Anyone interested in their genealogy is welcomed. There is a part of me that wishes I was in Salt Lake City today. I am interested in my genealogy. How interested are you in your genealogy? How interested are you in your heritage?

One of the reasons we cheer on Palm Sunday is that it is part of our spiritual heritage. In the church we spend so much time looking at the New Testament. The reason is, Jesus dominates the New Testament. However, that does not mean the Old Testament isn't important. Our tradition believes in the witness of both the Old and the New Testaments. Jesus came out of an Old Testament world. Jesus was Jewish and observed all the Old Testament customs. My seminary professor would say, the perfect church should observe all the Old Testament customs and holidays. This is the beginning of Passover. It is not just a time for the Jews to remember how God saved their ancestors. It is a time to remember *our* ancestors. Their story is our story. When you look back on history, you can see God's plan of salvation. We cheer on Palm Sunday because the plan is one step closer to completion. And all of God's people said, "**Hosanna!**" First, we cheer on Palm Sunday because of our personal history. Second, we cheer on Palm Sunday because of our heritage. Third and finally, we cheer on Palm Sunday because heaven is our future home.

## Heaven

Look at the text with me. The crowd cheered on that Palm Sunday because they thought they knew how the story was going to end, a political revolution. They were wrong. Rome dominated their future for years to come. We have information they didn't have. We know what happened. Next week, we return to remember the resurrection. It was be Easter! No event in history changed the world more than the resurrection. There is no Easter without Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday we remember the fact that Jesus came to sacrifice himself. On Palm Sunday we are poised to remember the events of Holy Week. Each day is special. No wonder we cheer.

According to Mark:

On Monday, Jesus cleansed the temple. It has nothing to do with the youth fundraising in the hallway. It has nothing to do with selling dinner tickets to aid the budget. However, it is about religious leaders abusing their position for personal gain.

On Tuesday, Jesus cursed the fig tree. It was the only thing that Jesus cursed. I hope you remember the fig tree symbolized Israel, itself. It is like gunning down an eagle.

On Wednesday, Jesus taught in the temple courts about the Kingdom of God. They are some of Jesus' most memorable words.

On Thursday, Jesus observed the Seder. He washed the disciples' feet and he gave us a memorial for the ages. On that same day he was arrested and tried by his own people.

On Friday, he stood before the Roman governor Pilate and died on the cross.

On Saturday, the people in his life mourned because they had no hope.

How do you run through Holy Week and forget those things? All those things are important because they are one more step in the God's plan of salvation. We cheer on Palm Sunday because we know what the future holds, heaven! And all of God's people said, "**Hosanna!**"

One of the things I missed while I was overseas was the election of the new pope. You know the story. For the first time in 598 years the pope resigned. The reason Benedict XVI resigned was declining health due to his age. There are 1.2 billion Roman Catholics in the world today. Each one was caught off guard by the resignation. When Pope Francis I was elected, he became the first pope to come from the Americas and the first pope to be elected from the southern hemisphere. I don't know how you feel about the Roman Catholic Church, but I would encourage you to pray for Pope Francis I. His church is facing some tremendous challenges. Everyone is wondering how he is going to handle them. Perhaps that is why so many were anticipating his first public Mass. More than 150,000 people came to his first Mass.

He prayed for ten minutes and spoke about compassion. Then, he did something no one expected. He walked into the crowd. He blessed both cripples and infants. I don't know what the future holds, but they loved him that day because he became one of the people. Maybe that is one of the reasons we love Jesus? On that first Palm Sunday he was simply one of the people.

It is Palm Sunday, and on this day we cheer for Jesus! We cheer for Jesus for three reasons. First, Palm Sunday is part of our personal **history**. What do you remember about your first Palm Sunday? Second, we cheer for Jesus because it is part of our **heritage**. The faith is not new. We are no different from the people in the crowd. We all need forgiveness. Third and finally, we cheer for Jesus because he made our future home possible, **heaven!** I have never met a person who did not want to go to heaven. Laura Gale once said, *"Palm Sunday is like a glimpse of Easter. It's a little bit joyful after the somber season of Lent."* And all of God's people said, **"Hosanna!"**