

April 5, 2020

Holy Week 2020

What Do You Remember?

Matthew 21:1-11

There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not a single week should be wasted. Have you ever stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? There is one week, however, 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's earthly ministry. It recalls the expectations of Palm Sunday, the cursing of Holy Monday, the teachings of Holy Tuesday, the betrayal of Holy Wednesday, the rejection of Maundy Thursday, the devastation of Good Friday and the final victory of Easter morning.

This is Palm Sunday. On this day, we remember Jesus's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. The scene itself is truly symbolic. Jesus acts out the words of Zechariah 9:9, *"Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion. Shout, Daughter Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."* The crowd acts out the words of Psalm 118:26, *"Bless is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we will bless you."* The early church understood the significance of the day. Each one of the Gospel writers recorded the event. Today, we hear Matthew's version. Our Gospel reading for today is Matthew 21:1-11. Let me call this message *Give Up Popularity!*

Matthew 21:1-11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ "Say to Daughter Zion,
See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

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

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

¹¹ The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Rick Warren (born 1954) of the Saddleback Church in California once said, "*Nothing will shape your life more than the commitments you make.*" I find that quote to be true. If you find some truth in that quote, say, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves today in the twenty-first chapter of Matthew. Like visiting an old friend, we find these words to be comforting. According to the text, a great crowd had gathered in the city of Jerusalem. The size of the crowd can't be over emphasized. Matthew calls it a very large crowd (Matthew 21:8). Mark says many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut palm branches from nearby fields. Some people followed Jesus; some people ran ahead of Jesus (Mark 11:8-9). Luke says the crowd was so great that the religious leaders encouraged Jesus to rebuke them (Luke 19:39). John tells of a great crowd that had gathered for the festival (John 12:12). You can't question the size of the crowd. It was great.

They had all come to celebrate the Passover, a time to remember their proud past as God's Chosen People. The law required the people to attend, but no legislation was necessary. Everyone wanted to be a part of the great holiday. It was a time to do three things. First, they made their annual animal sacrifice at the temple. Second, they paid their annual taxes. Third, it was a time to reconnect with family and friends. It is for that reason that everyone wanted to be in Jerusalem for the Passover. It has been estimated that the population of Jerusalem swelled to 2,500,000 on that Passover, and the name on the lips of everyone was "Jesus". What was on the mind of the many was revolution.

They had grown tired of foreign domination. They had grown tired of Roman ways and laws. They longed for independence, and Jesus seemed to be the best person to lead a revolution. He seemed to have it all. He had the power to heal the sick. He had the power to control nature. He had the charisma to win over any crowd. The crowd seems to be trying to draft Jesus for this military position. Don't ignore the next line. The crowd did political things. Just like their ancestors who experienced military victories, they spread cloaks and palm branches on the ground. Others waved palm branches and yelled, "Hosanna to the son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!" They did all they could do to enlist Jesus, but there is something wrong with the picture. Two thousand years later, we see the imperfection clearly. Jesus wasn't interested in the political scene of that generation. Jesus was only interested in eternity. That is why Jesus rode in on a humble animal and not a mighty steed. That generation was nearsighted and missed the reason why that day was so important.

I hope you don't miss the significance of that day. Palm Sunday is not just the Sunday before Easter. Palm Sunday is the beginning of Holy Week. During Holy Week we remember what Jesus did each day. It is a spiritual pilgrimage. If you just show up next

week and celebrate the resurrection, then you have cheated yourself of an opportunity to draw near to Jesus. In the history of the American church, there has never been a Palm Sunday like this one. Due to the pandemic, our daily routine has been upset. We suddenly have extra time. I would challenge you to take some of that time and remember what Jesus did every day of Holy Week. It is important for you do it this year, because we may never have this opportunity again. So, let me ask you this question: what do you remember?

Do you remember what happened on Holy Monday? According to the Bible, two significant things happened on that day. The first event of Holy Monday was the cleansing of the Temple. It had nothing to do with fundraising to help some good cause but had everything to do with using the faith for personal gain. The Temple was a place of prayer, not profit. The church is a place of prayer, not profit. The second significant event of Holy Monday is the cursing of the fig tree. It was the only thing Jesus ever cursed. Like the bald eagle symbolizes America, the fig tree symbolized Israel. The cursing of the fig tree was an act of judgement upon Israel. God was doing something new. If you are thankful for what Christ did for you on Holy Monday, say, **"Hosanna!"**

Do you remember what happened on Holy Tuesday? According to the Bible, Jesus went back to the Temple, where he was challenged by the Pharisees and the Sadducees. It was also there that he taught about the Kingdom of God. Two great stories came from that day. He taught about paying taxes to Caesar and he noticed a widow's slim donation. He also told the parable of the two sons, the parable of the tenants and others. Then, he went to Bethany, near Jerusalem, where he was anointed. He was being prepared for death. If you are thankful for what Jesus did for you on Holy Tuesday, say, **"Hosanna!"**

Do you remember what happened on Holy Wednesday? Some call it Spy Wednesday. It was on that day the plan to trap Jesus was conceived. One of his own, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Some say, he did it because he was greedy. Some say, he did it because he had grown tired of being an outsider. He was the only non-Galilean of the twelve. Some say, he did it to force Jesus' hand. He never dreamed Jesus wouldn't fight back. We don't really know why he did it, but he did it. In the end, Judas Iscariot regretted his betrayal and committed suicide. There is nothing else to say. If you are thankful for what Jesus did for you on Holy Wednesday, say, **"Hosanna!"**

Do you remember what happened on Holy Thursday? We call it Maundy Thursday. That was the day Jesus washed the disciples' feet, showing true servant leadership. Then, they observed the Seder. It was a meal with a message. Everything they ate and everything they drank reminded them of their people's past. After all, they were God's Chosen. During the meal, Jesus changed the words and created a new memorial, Communion. The bread is his body and the wine's his blood. After the meal was completed, Jesus comforted the disciples and went to the garden to pray. It was in the

garden Jesus was arrested. If you are thankful for what Jesus did for you on Maundy Thursday, say, "**Hosanna!**"

Do you remember what happened on Holy Friday? We call it Good Friday. It was good for us, but bad for Jesus. He had two trials on that one day. The first trial was in front of his own people. It was a "kangaroo" court. Jesus never had a chance. He was found guilty. They wanted to execute Jesus, but they lacked the legal authority. For this reason, they sent him to the Roman Governor, Pilate. He knew Jesus was an innocent man, but he feared the mob. They rejected Jesus and accepted Barabbas. The order was given that Jesus must die. It was a public affair. It was a way of deterring crime. First came the whipping. Then came the crown of thorns. Finally came the cross, a Roman way to execute. Jesus was not tied to the cross; he was nailed to the cross. He was hung between two common criminals. His death came quickly, and they put his body in a tomb. The sky grew dark and the people wondered. His family and friends cried, because he was dead, and their dreams were gone. If you are thankful for what Jesus did for you on Good Friday, say, "**Hosanna!**"

Do you remember what happened on Holy Saturday? Some call it, Silent Saturday. Others call it Black Saturday or Easter Eve. There is nothing to remember about that day, because Jesus was dead. The people who loved Jesus, both family and friends, struggled with his death. Some of them were in shock. Some were in denial and some of them cried. Their great dreams of a bright future were over. Jesus was dead! Even today, people are uncomfortable with the death of Jesus. If you are uncomfortable with death, say, "**Hosanna!**" You know what happened on Sunday. It is the worst secret in the history of the world. It is also the very foundation of our faith. It changed everything.

One of the most beautiful places in the world is the cathedral in Milan, Italy. I had the good fortune to worship there several years ago. Worshippers are welcomed by three magnificent doorways. Over the first one, is a carving of a beautiful wreath of roses, and underneath it is the legend, "All which pleases is just for a moment." Over the second is a sculpted cross, and the words, "All that troubles is just for a moment." But underneath the great central entrance to the main aisle is the inscription, "Only the eternal is important." The message is clear. We should live for the permanent and the eternal. How much time do you spend worrying about the temporary? The great pandemic has forced millions to worry around the world. How much time do you spend worrying about the eternal? The only things that really matter are those things that will matter in 100 years. What matters in 100 years? The only thing that will matter in 100 years is Jesus. Do you remember the quote from Rick Warren? He once said, "*Nothing will shape your life more than the commitments you make.*" I find that quote to be true. If you find some truth in that quote, say, "**Amen!**"