

The Federated Church of Hyannis ~ Rev. Derek L. White, pastor

Palm Sunday ~ March 28, 2021

Sermon: Behold the King of Glory

Scripture: John 12:12-16

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

Introduction

Greetings as we come together and celebrate Palm Sunday. Last week we concluded our series on "Letting Go". Today marks the beginning of Holy Week. For those watching online and on Television Channel 99, please know all our Holy Week services will be posted online. The Easter Sunday service will be on Channel 99. There will also be an Easter Sunrise Service this year at St. Andrew's by the Sea Chapel in Hyannisport for those that wish to gather in-person at 6:00 AM. That will be a community ecumenical service being led by various clergy and churches in the Hyannis area. If you wish to attend, please be sure to wear a mask and socially distance. Arrive a little early to find a space as we navigate outdoor worship with social distancing.

Today is Palm Sunday and it is a joy to be able to celebrate this Sunday in the life of the church. There is a rich history behind the story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. And that history is so important to understand the context behind Holy Week.

PART 1: Year 167 BC

There are several significant things happening in the story of Palm Sunday. As many of us know, Jesus rode into Jerusalem riding on a donkey and the people were waving Palm branches. What does not get communicated in the Gospels but was well known in Jerusalem at the time when the Gospels were written is the story of the Maccabees. In 167 BC three brothers named the Maccabees led a revolt against the Greeks who had occupied Jerusalem. As part of the campaign of Alexander the Great to Hellenize the world by making all captured people assimilate to being Greek, the Greeks sacrificed pigs on the altar in the Holy of

Holies inside the temple. They also placed statues of Greek gods inside the temple. It was a campaign to break the religious identity of the Jewish people by taking away their ability to use the temple as a center of their identity. The three brothers launched several revolts to drive the Greeks out of Jerusalem and reclaim the city. The brothers were eventually successful in defeating the Greeks who occupied Jerusalem and regained control of the temple. This battle is celebrated in the tradition of Hanukkah. For eight nights the consecrated oil in the temple for the lamps helped hold on to the temple and fight off the Greeks. After the Maccabees drove the Greeks out of the temple, they rode into Jerusalem on donkeys and the people waved palm branches and laid cloaks in the road. This was the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. And the brothers at various times were recognized as kings. The march of palms was the coronation ceremony for recognizing kingship. The Gospel writers do not tell this part of the story in the Gospels because it was a well-known story at the time when they wrote the Gospels. The story of Hanukkah is well known to this day, but as more Gentiles converted to the faith the fact of the Maccabean Revolt became less known in Christian tradition.

PART 2: Jesus is King

The term Messiah has several meanings in Hebrew. It means anointed one. Jesus is not the first person to have the title of Messiah. There were many before him that would have been called Messiah. A priest that was anointed with oil might be called Messiah. A prophet anointed with oil might be called Messiah. A king anointed with oil would have been called Messiah. What makes Jesus unique as Messiah is that he is priest, prophet, king, and the son of the living God. Jesus is the king the people were waiting for from the line of David. His birth in Bethlehem is significant because it fulfills the promise God made to David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne for ever and ever. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem the Romans are the occupying force. The Romans took control of the city after the Greeks. Unlike the Greeks they allowed the people to keep their traditions and religions, they just taxed the people for the privilege of peace under Roman occupation for the right to exercise their religion. The people in Jerusalem were waiting for a leader who would lead a revolt and drive out the Romans the way the Maccabees drove out the Greeks. There were many who had attempted such a thing. The zealots were a group of freedom fighters who used guerrilla warfare through insurgency to attempt to drive out the Romans. You may recall that Barabbas was the man the people asked Pilate to release from prison instead of Jesus on Good Friday. Barabbas was a key leader of the zealots. When the people realized Jesus would not lead a revolt, they asked for Barabbas to be returned from prison. The expectation of the crowd cheering for Jesus on Palm Sunday was for

him to start a revolt and become the new king of Jerusalem like the Maccabees. But Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, it is bigger than that. On the cross we often see the letters INRI. The reason those letters are there is because they spell out the crime for which Jesus was sentenced to death. In Latin the J is represented as an I. So INRI stands for Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. In Latin the word for king is "rex" so that is how we get the R. Jesus was sentenced to death by Pilate for claiming to be a king without the approval of Caesar. Pilate's hand was forced to sentence Jesus to death because Jesus was recognized as a king and his presence in Jerusalem would have jeopardized the peace. Jesus was recognized by the people as a king.

PART 3: Why the Palms?

When Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey and the people waved palm branches, he was greeted as a king. Jesus would be the last king of Israel. This fulfills the prophecy that out of the line of David one would sit upon the throne forever. Since Jesus rose from the grave his reign has no end. No one can replace Jesus. For centuries on Palm Sunday Christians have waved palm branches to recognize Jesus as Lord, King of Kings, Blessed Messiah, Lamb of God, Savior, etc. etc. Jesus came to establish a new kingdom, not one defined by geographical markers. He came to replace the temple as the place of worship. Wherever two or three are gathered in his name, there he is among us today. He established a new covenant and a new way of understanding the kingdom of God. The palms represent Jesus as Lord. When we wave them in church, we confess that Jesus is Lord. For thousands of years this tradition has been carried on. Even during pandemics, we the Church today still confess Jesus is Lord.

CONCLUSION: Holy Week

As we enter Holy Week, let us remember how it begins with Jesus being coronated as king. And as we come to the end of Holy Week let us also remember that Jesus still is king. Consider the events of Holy Week. Think about the last supper he shared with the disciples recognized as a king. Think about how this king washed their feet. Think about how this king prayed in the garden before his arrest. Think about how this king was judged by sinful people. Think about how this king was executed on a cross. And think about how this king rose from the grave on Easter. Many kings may claim they have the power to decide life and death for their subjects, but Jesus is the only one who has the power over death to offer true life, eternal life to those who call him Lord. May we continue to see him as Lord and King of our lives. Amen.