

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED **Matthew 21:6-9****NEEDY SOULS, WELCOME THE HUMBLE KING!**

So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Today we welcome a king—the King! Have you ever welcomed a king? When I lived in the Fargo-Moorhead area in the 1980's, it made quite a news splash that the reigning King of Norway was coming to visit the community. Fargo-Moorhead was and is a very Norwegian area. A welcoming was planned for the King, to which all were invited. One of our church mothers said her little boy, maybe 5 or 6 at the time, wanted to see the king. Imagine in the mind of a 5 or 6 year old, the thought of going to see the king! I never did hear if little Jamie was disappointed. I know I was, and I didn't even go to see the king. I watched the news reports at 6:00 that evening. The King of Norway? Just an ordinary looking fellow, wearing a suit and tie—nothing so very distinguished looking. Not much here.

Today we think back to Jesus' birth at Bethlehem and how the shepherds welcomed Him there. In fact our text is not about His birth, but from Matthew's Palm Sunday account, describing how the people welcomed Jesus some thirty-three years later as King into their capital city Jerusalem. In both instances, like my impression of the King of Norway, there was nothing outwardly distinguishing or impressive about His arrival.

When the people welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with their coats on the road, palm branches on the road, perhaps even waving palm branches, and crying out, Hosanna to the Son of David!, it wasn't because He looked so distinguished. We assume He wore the average garb of the day—standard robe without the ornaments of the high-up Pharisees and scribes and with sandals on His feet. In fact earlier, when the shepherds had found him at Bethlehem, was there anything impressive about his garb? Just a babe wrapped in snug baby wraps, in strips of cloth, swaddling clothes. So if Jesus were arriving in Lemmon today, on Palm Sunday, would he come dressed to a "T"? Or would He wear the average garb of the people? Standard jeans, a flannel shirt, work-boots or soft-soled shoes, a stocking cap, etc.? If He arrived as a baby, he would not have some fancy expensive receiving blanket and one-piece outfit. Just ordinary baby clothes, and an ordinary diaper. Yes a diaper for the King! If you welcome Him today because He is outwardly impressive, you have the wrong Jesus.

Did He arrive in an impressive manor? Did he enter Jerusalem riding in a chariot of the wealthy? Or did He come riding on a horse, a steed of power and speed, an awesome warhorse? No, He came riding on a donkey—a "hypo-zugion" in Greek—"under the yoke"—that is a beast for burdens. Whenever you watch old Westerns from the '50's and '60's, the hero or main character always had a fine horse, a fast horse. But when a character was shown riding a donkey--or mule, it was always in a bit of comic-relief, a touch of humor. Not much honor there. This was exactly the way Jesus wanted it. He had sent the disciples to get that donkey and that colt. He knew they were there. They were for Him! Likewise, Jesus didn't arrive on earth in an impressive manner. Lying in manger. Sleeping in a feedbox for the livestock. And that was the way He wanted it. He came at a time when there would be no room in the inn. That manger was reserved for Him! He came in lowliness and humility. And if Jesus were arriving on Palm Sunday in Lemmon today, would he come in a fancy, luxurious, powerful limousine, fit for a King? Um, how about a dented and well used pick-up truck? Or maybe a small motor cycle—ying-ying-ying-ying.

Indeed, the people honored Him on Palm Sunday and at Bethlehem, but they *didn't* honor Him because of His impressive appearance. Likewise on Palm Sunday they didn't honor Him *just* because of His position of being king. Caesar from Rome could have come to visit and I think many of that crowd would not have welcomed him. I mean, the president of the U.S., whether the out-going or the in-coming, could come to Lemmon today, and some would not go out to welcome him—regardless of his position. Nor was Jesus honored and welcomed on Palm Sunday just because of His diligent and meticulous life, responsibly carrying out everything and every assignment perfectly. Nor did the crowds gather just because of His power. He was powerful all right. No doubt about it. Likewise today, if the world's body building, Mr. Muscle, top champion, weightlifter could come to town would you necessarily go out to see him and welcome him? Maybe not.

Why did the people welcome Jesus on Palm Sunday? For very good, heartfelt reasons. They had seen Him “work” for the past three years. They had seen Him use His kingly position, His wisdom, His power to help them in love. He had fed their hungry, healed their sick and dying. He even raised their loved ones, who had died, back to life! He had driven cruel demons out of many. He had comforted sad and downtrodden hearts and souls with words of God’s compassion and peace in contrast to the evil entrapments and lies of this world and Satan himself. He shared the Father’s forgiveness with mothers and fathers struggling to find their way, imperfectly fulfilling their role as parent. He shared His forgiveness with wayward young people regretting the poor choices they had made. He shared forgiveness with cheating-and-taking-advantage-of-you tax collectors. He had come for the adulterers and prostitutes, low-lights indeed. Forgiveness and healing on the inside, and guidance to live a new life as an adopted child of God on the outside. He had come in love to rescue. He cared for these people. Now they came to welcome Him at Jerusalem and honor Him, the King that God promised to send for dying sinners in a dying world. They didn’t understand how that very week would unfold, that He would be crucified, dead, and buried, but the third day rise again! They did know He loved them, and could and would do anything for them. They welcomed Him in love.

Isn’t that the same reason that the shepherds came to see the Baby in the manger! The angel had announced to them that this was the Savior, the one who “*saves*”—from sin, death, and the devil. The angel had explained that this was Christ the Lord—the “Christ,” the one God “anointed” and appointed to be their great King and Prophet and Priest forever. With love they honored the One who came to the manger in Bethlehem in love for them.

Why are you here to welcome Him today? It’s all about His love for you. It’s about the lowly king who comes in love for you—you, with all your cares, and woes, and worries, and burdens, and guilt, and shame, and hopes dashed, and still dreams for a better day. It has come—He has come! He has come to help and to rescue you from sins, from death, from Satan and hell—all beyond your furthest ability and efforts, help which you so desperately need. You have come to welcome Him in love.

Jesus did receive honor and glory on Palm Sunday. He rode on a colt, a foal of a donkey, on which no one had ever ridden. It was new. For Him! The people waved palm branches, green fronds of life and peace, especially significant in the desert regions nearby where palm trees were refreshing sites and shade at an oasis. They took the less than new cloaks they had and put them on the road for Him, so that He did not have to ride in the dust. So what if their cloaks got dirty and even spattered with donkey doo. This was for Jesus! The multitudes that went before and followed after, were crying out “Hosanna! Come save us now! Hosanna! O promised royal heir of King David’s throne. Hosanna in the highest!”

It was the same at His birth. Although He did not display His own honor, honor was given Him. He entered this life by way of His virgin mother. Plus, the shepherds uncharacteristically left their charges, their flocks, behind. This was for Jesus! An angel of God announced His arrival, and then a multitude of angels praised Him. “Glory to God in the highest! This is Christ the Lord, God Himself, the King promised long ago, to come from David’s line, born at Bethlehem, the city of David. The One bringing peace and God’s favor to a sinful world!” Indeed, Glory to God in the highest! And on Palm Sunday, Hosanna in the highest! As high as the praised could be extended.

In the same manner, you who are in need, take comfort in the arrival of your best Friend, your Brother, your Savior, your King. Praise Him with love and joy in your hearts. Join in singing:

“Come your hearts and voices raising,
Christ the Lord with gladness praising,
Loudly sing His love amazing,
Worthy folk of Christendom!

Sin and death may well be groaning,
Satan now may well be moaning,
We our full salvation owning,
Cast our every care away!” (Hymn # 90).

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach