

Palm Sunday - Sixth Sunday in Lent
April 17, 2011
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 21:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!" When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." (NIV)

I guess it has been several weeks now since the news of the death of Elizabeth Taylor. On the day I heard of her passing, I was out at noon hour with some of the teachers at Beautiful Savior and made mention of it. One of the younger teachers there simply asked: "*Who's Elizabeth Taylor?*" When he said this a couple of thoughts came to mind. One is the fact that I'm getting older. The people and things I have heard of, that I am familiar with - the actors, the shows, the athletes - are not the same ones the younger generation knows. Perhaps you've gotten similar reminders. But the second thing this comment taught me again is how fame is so much like this - fleeting. The person who is hot today, may not be tomorrow. The person famous now might one day be seen as a nobody. The star who can't go anywhere without being mobbed by adoring crowds, might not even be recognized by a future generation. Grandma and Grandpa point to a former celebrity in the grocery store and the kid says "*who?*" The once popular icon has become yesterday's news.

Could this ever happen to us with Jesus? Would it be possible to see Jesus as our king today, but tomorrow see Jesus as a nobody? Might people who worship Jesus this morning one day no longer sing His praises? Could it be conceivable for people to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior now, but in the future say: "*Jesus who?*" As we join the Palm Sunday crowds in confessing Jesus as the Son of David, as we join them in singing "*Hosanna,*" as we welcome Jesus into the city for the last time, I pray for all of us that: **Our King Jesus is always today's news.**

Was anyone as popular as Jesus as He gets on a donkey and rides into Jerusalem? I don't imagine anyone at this time being more famous, more of a celebrity, getting more attention. All the hubbub was about this Jesus from Nazareth. Jesus was certainly hot - a star - the main attraction. After all, thousands and thousands of people had heard Jesus teach with authority. They had witnessed the miracles. Just a few days earlier Jesus even

raised a friend, Lazarus, from the dead. This news was spreading like wildfire. Jesus' popularity was growing and growing. In fact, after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the enemies of Jesus called a meeting of the Sanhedrin and remarked: ***"If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him"*** (John 11).

These are the circumstances. This helps us understand the scene which we now witness. Jesus makes careful plans to enter Jerusalem on this first day of the week. ***"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 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. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.'*** Before we can even ask why Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem this way, Matthew gives us the answer: ***"This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"*** Jesus fulfills every promise and prophecy ever written about the Messiah. Jesus wants it to be clear that He is the King of whom Zechariah had written.

Now picture this scene as our King Jesus sits on this donkey and comes riding into Jerusalem. Visualize the fanfare, the excitement, the energy. Imagine the noise, and the shouts, and the songs. Try to put yourselves into the action as we read: ***"A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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!'"*** Talk about rolling out the red carpet! Jesus is the one everyone wants to see - the star of all stars. The people all crowd around to get a glimpse of this King. They shout and praise His great name. We read: ***"when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?'"*** ***The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'***

Aren't we glad the Gospel writers allow us to join in with the Palm Sunday crowds and watch Jesus enter the city of Jerusalem for us? We get to see our King. We get to sing and say ***"Hosanna...Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."*** We get to worship and praise Jesus. We have opportunity to confess Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David, the Lord who comes to save us. We hear Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth, speak God's Word to us. Jesus is certainly today's news. The arrival of our King Jesus is front page material.

But how about tomorrow, or the next day, or five days from now? What about when the crowds disperse, and the excitement and emotion and fanfare come to an end? If you stood among the crowd on Palm Sunday and made a comment such as, ***"Jesus fame in this city will not last for long,"*** or predicted ***"that in a few days Jesus will be a nobody,"*** you would've been laughed at or even worse. In fact, many times the enemies of Jesus backed off because of how much the crowds loved Jesus. Yet, as improbable, unlikely, and inconceivable as this may have sounded on Palm Sunday, we know exactly what happens to Jesus as we follow Him throughout this week we call holy. By Friday, crowds of people are singing and shouting a much different tune. Instead of praise we hear the chilling chants of ***"Crucify, crucify...We have no king but Caesar...Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"*** (John 19) Jesus was no longer hot, the one all

the people wanted on their side. He got jeers instead of cheers. The star, the once popular celebrity, was numbered with the criminals. This One hailed as king was nailed to a cross and killed. Suddenly on Friday in the eyes of many Jesus became a nobody, and by Saturday Jesus was yesterday's news.

We can't say for certain how many, if any, of the same large crowds that praised Jesus on this Sunday, turned on Jesus Friday. But what a change! How could things turn so quickly in just one week and could the same thing ever happen to you or me? Could our view of Jesus ever change so dramatically? First of all, what is our view of Jesus as our King? Many of the people on Palm Sunday only saw Jesus as a great teacher and miracle worker. They wanted Jesus to provide them bread like He did the five thousand, and heal their sick like He did for many. The people of Israel wanted this King to ride into Jerusalem and use His power to free them the hated Romans. When Jesus was not this kind of king, when He was arrested and placed into the hands of the Romans, many dumped Jesus like a bad habit.

We can be sure the devil will tempt us to do the same. When problems arise, when things in life are not going well, the devil will try to get us to blame God. *"What good is it for you to trust in Jesus only to have these things happen to you?"* But the devil also plays to the opposite side, and wants us to ignore God when everything is going very well for us. *"What do you need Jesus for when you are doing just fine on your own?"* And the devil is constantly attempting to lead us into sins that separate us from God, He is always trying to pull us away from God's Word. Satan knows Word and Sacrament teach and strengthen us in the knowledge that Jesus is our gracious King. So the devil doesn't want us to hear it. He doesn't want us to train and teach our children in these truths. He wants us and our kids to one day say *"Jesus who?"*

That's why is it so important to see over and over the kind of King Jesus is for us. If we join this celebration today, and join the celebration next Sunday, but ignore what takes place in between, we are missing out on what kind of king Jesus is and what this King came to do. If the people on Palm Sunday were looking hard enough they would have noticed. Jesus is so much different than any other king. He doesn't come using His force and power. He comes gentle, humble, and riding on a donkey. He comes into the city, in fact, to suffer in depths of humility never seen before. This King came to wear a crown of thorns. He came to be obedient to death - even death on a cross. He came to save sinners by shedding His own blood. Jesus came to suffer and die on a cross to make payment to God for all our wavering, for all our misplaced priorities, for all our sins. Jesus came to be a nobody so that you and I can now be a somebody before God the Father. Next week Sunday we will celebrate how Jesus did not disappoint. Jesus is still a King that comes to us in lowly quiet ways - He comes to us in His simple Word. We too sing Hosanna, *"Lord save"* in our liturgy as our King Jesus also comes to us with His own body and blood through simple bread and wine.

I'm thankful we all know Jesus as our King, our Savior, who comes into the city riding a lowly donkey on this Palm Sunday. On this day Jesus made all the headlines and received all the praise and glory. We too celebrate for we know the real reason Jesus entered Jerusalem. But may our praise not end tomorrow, or the next day, or five days from now. For Jesus has brought us into a kingdom of which there is no end. He lives and reigns forever. In our lives may our King Jesus always be today's news. Amen.

