**Mark 11:1-11 March 28, 2021 (Palm Sunday)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Mark chapter 11 here re-reading these words, “And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The high point of the entire Church Year is Holy Week, the culmination of Lent, the final steps on the road to Easter, and it begins here on Palm Sunday with the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. He comes to get the job done. He comes to right the wrongs of the past. The people cry Hosanna! Which means “Save us now” and they wait in eager anticipation for the work to get done, for salvation to come, for their freedom to be restored from an oppressive Roman government who is literally nailing people to crosses so that they die in the most excruciating way possible. Their expectations are high. Their assumptions are a conqueror of enormous power and influence, their King has finally arrived! And for this morning I want you to imagine yourself as one of those people, with your coat on the road, with a palm branch in your hand, watching Jesus Christ arrive in Jerusalem.

He rides in on a donkey. This is no galloping war horse. This isn’t even like…the nicest of the donkeys, this is a colt meaning a new donkey that has to be tamed in order to be ridden. Donkeys aren’t known for their speed they are used as pack animals and they aren’t necessarily very…impressive. But still, this is your guy. This is the moment. This is where we finally get to see the action, he’s gonna ride that donkey all the way up to road and zap every Roman soldier on the way. Just you watch!

He slowly rides in a lowly donkey, and as Mark records he enters Jerusalem, and goes to the temple. He doesn’t go where Pilate is. He doesn’t go to a place of political power where he can stand before the entire city and declare them liberated and free, he goes to the temple. And this next part is where I believe the crowds evaporated, and really in a way where we find the seeds planted of their hatred and vitriol that we will see later in this week where they cry for him to be crucified. Mark writes that Jesus went into the temple, and looks around at everything. That’s right. The promised Savior, the omniscient Jesus, the one who had performed miracles so great that he walked on water, returned people to life, raising them from death! The one who had multiplied food for 5000 people from just a few measly loaves of bread and a few fish, wait a minute, that Savior, that Messiah, the one we have been waiting for….doesn’t even know what the temple looks like?! These people had been in the temple their whole lives, the temple was magnificent but the idea that Jesus is just slowly making his way around the temple and looking at everything like a tourist at a museum? That was the moment the anticipation waned. When the hope started to fade away. I thought he was here to save us? All he’s doing is sight seeing. I thought he was here to conquer! He came in on a donkey…I thought he was going to do this and not waste any time! He rode in on a slow beast and now he’s just…..looking at stuff. This isn’t my Savior. This isn’t my Messiah. This isn’t what I wanted. This isn’t the guy….

And what should be done with this fake? With this self appointed King of the Jews who gives Jews a bad name, who can’t give us anything, who can’t help us overthrow the Romans, who is even in Roman custody just a few days after he arrived? What good is he? What does he offer? Who cares if he lives or dies? As a matter of fact, the source of entertainment at this time was to go and mock and yell at those who are condemned to die and hanging in agony, so you know what? Put him up there too! Crucify him! Get rid of him! He ruined my coat with his slow donkey, my arm still hurts from cutting down that palm branch and waving it all morning, he can’t do anything for me so away he goes, good riddance. I’m done with him.

Now take yourself out of their shoes. What a journey in a few short days. And what was the start of it all? Jesus went to the temple. He went to the house of His Father. He went to see what the people were experiencing in His Father’s house. They wanted to be saved and he came to do just that, to save them from sin, to save them from the greatest threat to their souls and what they will experience for all eternity, but they only thought about the here, the now, the present, their current state of occupation. They had expectations and assumptions, and when Jesus didn’t meet their preconceived notions, they were more than happy to see him hang and die.

And if Easter is a happy day of eggs and candy, or if Easter to you is just a time to gather with friends and family and remember Jesus rising from the dead, this story is meaningless. Maundy Thursday doesn’t really matter. Good Friday isn’t worth going to. Your expectation for Easter is a happy one, filled with joy, family, and fun. You don’t need the coats and the Palms, it’s like the prequel to the main story you want to hear about. You definitely don’t need to see everything taken off the altar in somber silence or come to a depressing service of black where we read the entire Passion Story, where we sing solemn songs speaking of Jesus being “stricken, smitten and afflicted” the entire service is centered around the death of Jesus Christ. If your expectations for Easter are the bright colors and the fun Spring events, you will be as disappointed as the crowds. There’s nothing for you here this next week. But these services are necessary, because Holy Week is the culmination, not just Easter the day. Holy Week is a journey within a journey, to expose our own sins and to put us in the shoes of these members of the crowd so we don’t see ourselves as any different.

We have assumptions of God, we have demands of God, we believe that salvation and being saved from the worries and cares of this world happen in only one specific way. That we go to God in prayer and he does what we want. The sickness is taken away, the job is ours, that we get the help we need, Hosanna God! Save us now! We have problems! What good is God if he can’t do what we want him to do? Why would I need God if he isn’t able to help me? You know what, if all God is doing up there is looking at things and not helping, I don’t need him anymore than the crowds needed Jesus. What is our relationship to God our Father? To Jesus, His Son? Our Savior? To the Holy Spirit, who guides and counsels us? We despise what our Father provides for us. We despise the preaching and Word of Jesus, His Son. We despise the Holy Spirit’s work in our heart by constantly superseding what he says and urges us to do. We are faced with our sin in the anger of the crowds.

Which is why we go to gethsemane. And Golgotha. This is a time of remembrance, and not just the good. Not only the white, and the lilies, and the trumpet, and the fun. But also the stripping away of the altar. And the encroaching darkness and extinguishing of the light. And the slamming of the tomb. That’s the journey. That’s the whole picture. Jesus comes to save them, but not in the way they wanted or the way they thought. And that’s alright. They didn’t know the right way, they didn’t know what they needed, so Jesus wasn’t interested in just placating their desires and wants, he came for their needs. And he took his time. He didn’t ride in on a chariot, or gallop in on a warhorse. He took his time. He went to the temple. He spends most of his time in prayer and contemplation. He knows what needs to be done. My dear friends, now is the time for preparation, here at the start of Holy Week, rather than at the end looking back. We have an amazing opportunity to worship together this week, to come to God’s house a year removed from when we had to observe this special time in isolation and exile from each other. This is the opportunity to see God’s love poured out for you in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To see the obedience of God’s own Son, as Paul writes in our Epistle lesson, “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” This is the time to set aside expectations and assumptions and come as a servant to the foot of a cross, humbled and obedient, opened up to what the Holy Spirit is saying in your heart to lead and guide you to a place of understanding that your true needs, the needs of your soul, are met here at God’s altar. In His body given for you. In His blood shed for you. In the work of salvation, the saving you desperately call for, not from all earthly cares and needs and wants, but in the true salvation of your soul in the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith. Come and receive, over and over again this week, the Lord’s Supper, the Sacrament of the Altar, the Eucharist or Thanksgiving meal together as God’s people.

We are blessed to even be a crowd in comparison to last year, so let’s make the most of it, not because we have to, but because God has blessed us with this opportunity. And when expectations and assumptions cloud our understanding and cause us to think only of ourselves and what we want, return to the Lord, see his example, know with confidence that He has a plan for you and that God had a plan for your salvation. He hears your cries of “Hosanna” Save us now! And he sent his Son Jesus Christ to die and rise again so that you are saved from the true threat of your soul. Journey together this week, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.