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“The Paradox of Palm Sunday”
Mark 11:1-10

When spiritual leaders fail us – it is particularly tragic. Perhaps the most recent public moral failure of a Christian leader is Ted Haggard, who was the head of the National Association of Evangelicals and was caught in sexual sin. A different pastor, 48-years old, down in Austin a few months ago, resigned because it was found he was stealing money from his 1,200 person church. He had been with the church for 15 years. In West Palm Beach Florida a 40-year old pastor was recently let go - for lying about his credentials. He claimed to have a bachelors and master’s degree – he had neither. Lying, stealing or immorality are, of course, wrong for anyone; but the fall of a spiritual leader has particularly damaging ripple effect.

One more story of a leader who fell. This leader found himself in a denominational court – being questioned not for stealing, or lying or immorality, but for bad theology: The chief priest leaned forward in his chair and said to Jesus **“Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”** (Mark 14:61). Jesus who had been silent until this point looked at the most important religious person in the nation and said: **“I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.”** (16:62). The chief priest ripped his clothes in horror and pronounced: **“What further need do we have of witnesses? (14:63) “You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death (14:64).**

I want us to remember this morning that 99% of the people around Jesus viewed his arrest and sentence of death as an embarrassing disaster – that would eclipse any other ministry failure we could think of. *The Pharisees* of course were delighted to see Jesus' popular ministry ending in shame – that was their plan. *Jesus' disciples* were crushed as their hopes and dreams evaporated – they had just wasted three years of their life. Jesus' family must have been mortified - muttering “I told you so” to one another. The crowds that had followed Jesus the last three years were busy now distancing themselves from Him. We begin our study of Palm Sunday with the reminder that the cross was perceived at the time not as the hope of the nations, but as the ultimate failure. Author Cheryl Forbes said, “That we never see God in failure, but only in success, is a strange attitude for people who have the cross as the center of their faith.”

Jesus has the sentence of death. Let's go there – to the death of Jesus. Mark chapter 15:16 “The soldiers took Him away into the palace and they called together the whole Roman cohort. Mark 15:17 They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; Mark 15:18 and they began to acclaim Him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Mark 15:19 They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. Mark 15:20 After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him. Mark 15:25 It was the third hour when they crucified Him. ...

The game was over. It was a disaster. The disciples have fled asking, “What went wrong? How did this happen? Five days before; the previous Sunday – everything seemed to be going so well. That day when Jesus made his “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem. It was

one of the high points of Jesus' ministry – how do we go from Palm Sunday to the cross?
Let's flash back to that happier time. Mark 11, starting in verse one.

Mark 11:1 - As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, Mark 11:2 and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied *there*, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it *here*. Mark 11:3 "If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here." Mark 11:4 They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they untied it. Mark 11:5 Some of the bystanders were saying to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" Mark 11:6 They spoke to them just as Jesus had told *them*, and they gave them permission. Mark 11:7 They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it. Mark 11:8 And many spread their coats in the road, and others *spread* leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. Mark 11:9 Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Mark 11:10 Blessed *is* the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!"

I said in my mid-week e-mail that I didn't know what to do with Palm Sunday. Do you love it, or leave it? Is Palm Sunday a celebration of Jesus' life, or an introduction to His death? Do we see Palm Sunday as the ultimate worship service – a large crowd gathered to worship and sing to Jesus? Or is this a pagan spectacle an ignorant crowd who has no idea who Jesus really is? Is it sweet or sour? Is it joyful or sad? Is it crunchy or creamy? It is a parade of celebration or a funeral procession? The answer of all those questions is "yes"

because in Palm Sunday we have a paradox of the highest order. G.K Chesterton said, “Christianity is a superhuman paradox whereby two opposite passions may blaze by each other.” And that is what we have here.

Commend the Crowd

First, concerning the crowd – “Should we commend the crowd and follow their example in spontaneous worship of Jesus? Or should we condemn them? If you study this passage, you will find many commentators are quite critical of the crowd. Ralph Martin says, “Quite likely these cries (Hosanna!) were an embarrassment to Jesus.” But there is no such criticism from the lips of Jesus. Jesus doesn’t say to the people; *“Stop! Don’t you know I am going to die! You ignorant fools!?”* He does no such thing, and if he did, it would be hypocritical. Because Jesus wanted their praise.

Did you notice how much preparation went into this event? The colt and the owner, say this and then bring him here. All of those details are persevered to show us that Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was carefully planned. Jesus is intentionally presenting himself, publically, for worship. He did not sneak into Jerusalem through the back gate. In the narrative of the gospel. After months of *“shhhh – don’t tell anyone who I am,”* Jesus begins his final period of ministry by nearly shouting to the people; *“The Messiah is Here! I am here. Worship Me.”* Matthew’s account emphasizes this: **Matt. 21:4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: Matt. 21:5 “SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, ‘BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.’** For the average Jewish person in Jerusalem that day, to worship Jesus as the Messiah was unavoidable. It was the only right thing to do!

Luke captures this in his account: [Luke 19:39](#) Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.” [Luke 19:40](#) But Jesus answered, “I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!” The triumphal entry into Jerusalem was Jesus’ idea – he lifts the veil a little higher so the people might see Him rightly as their Messiah. Their spontaneous and appropriate response is worship and praise.

Crowds were Wrong

You will remember the central question of the Gospel of Mark is: “Who is Jesus?” We need to apply that to this text. Did the people really know who Jesus was? Their praise was sweet, but their expectations were sour. It was a time of joy, but their ignorance of the Messiah’s purposes are sad. The crowds *and* Jesus’ disciples still expected Him to be their political savior. 150 years before Judas Maccabeus also rode into Jerusalem as a military hero - to the adoration of the crowds. They expect Jesus to dismount from his donkey and to take up a war horse. Neither the crowds, nor the disciples, were not ready to deal with the paradox of a suffering Messiah. They all missed the clues – but the clues were there.

The crowd might have recalled the words of The Prophet said the Messiah would be, [“Is. 53:3](#) ...A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. [Is. 53:4](#) Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.” To the disciples, Jesus had already told them: “It is written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt” (Mark 9:12). “The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him...” (Mark

9:31). “We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death” (10:33).

But they crowd and the disciples were like kids who did not want to eat their vegetables. Children to want to avoid the hard work. They were still immature. They should have known better, but they didn't. I find it interesting that the Pharisees according to Matthew, rebuked Jesus for accepting the praise of children. Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF?’” (Matt 21:16). You see, in a way – they were all like infants and nursing babies. Their praise was a little shallow and uninformed – *just like yours and mine*. But Jesus deals with them graciously, just as he does us. Their praise had been prepared by Jesus to glorify Himself. We don't want to stay children, but to grow-up in our understanding of Christ – but even in that process we find grace.

Conclusion & Application

Lets begin to draw this to a close and consider areas of application. The other day I saw an acquaintance in Rowlett and mentioned to him that our church had experienced some growth. He said, “Ah, yes – *it is because of the economy. When times are hard – people want to find Jesus.*” And that caused me to think of this passage. People come to Jesus – calling out “Save me! Hosanna!” A poll by the National Sleep Foundation released last month, indicated that “1/3 of all Americans are losing sleep over the state of the U.S. economy and other personal finance concerns.” We are going through a really hard time as a country. A few months ago, a New Jersey reporter LEO D. ROMMEL filed a story indicating that the economy was filling up churches: He said, “The economic turbulence and people's

concern about their job status may be helping increase turnout at religious services. A Jewish Rabbi added "If anything, it may even help attendance," said Rabbi Ben Levy of Congregation Etz Chaim/Monroe Township Jewish Center. "People want to pray for their welfare." An Episcopal priest added: "People are coming more frequently," said Rev. Philip H. Kasey of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. "I think it is helping people put into perspective the things that are really important in their lives." Plus, they can't afford to do any stuff. There is no charge for coming to church."

When times are difficult – we line up like the crowds on Palm Sunday – and we go to church, which is good – and we turn to God, which is great! We cry Hosanna – Save us! That is the right thing to cry. But the key issue – the key question for you and I this morning is – *"Save us from what?"* The first century folk meant: "Save us from the Romans!" In 2001 we cried, "Save us from the Terrorists!" Now we cry, "Save us from poverty. Save us from unemployment." Democrats still cry "Save us from George Bush." The Republicans cry, "Save us from Barak Obama." Our cries are like those of a child – we cry for our comfort and our candy.

And in all of this we miss the point of Jesus' triumphal entry. We miss the whole point of Christianity. David Garland put it well: "The Crowd shouts "Hosanna! Save us! Thinking Jesus has come to save them from their political enemies. What we need is for him to save us from ourselves." Jesus says – before I get to the economy, or your politics - I am here to save **you**. The enemy is not out there, but the enemy is in here. I have come to save **you from your** anger, your selfishness, your hatred, your bitterness, your lying, your stealing, your immorality. Palm Sunday was not about Jesus' failure – not at all – it is about

your failure. You are the slave that needs to be set free. You are the prisoner that needs to be released. Jesus came to save you. Have you been saved from yourself? Have you been saved from yourself? Jesus wants to save you from your failure – and that is what Palm Sunday is all about – giving you a fresh start, a new life and real, genuine hope for the future. If you need help with your pipes – cry for a plumber. If you need help with your wires – cry for the electrician. If you need help with your taxes – cry for the accountant. If you need help with your soul – cry out to Jesus Christ.