

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 28 March

Children's Talk: Clothing

Today is Palm Sunday. Does anyone know why today is called Palm Sunday? It is called that because it is a holiday celebrating the time when the Lord came into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. Many people wanted Him to be there king, so they laid down a path for him to ride along. They made this path out of two things. In some tellings of the story, they used branches from palm trees, which we have here today. But they also used something else. See if you can notice what else they used to make a path for the Lord:

When He had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, when He drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Olivet, that He sent two of His disciples, saying, "Go into the village opposite you, where as you enter you will find a young donkey tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose it and bring it here. And if anyone asks you, 'Why are you loosing it?' thus you shall say to him, 'Because the Lord has need of it.' "

So those who were sent went their way and found it just as He had said to them. But as they were loosing the young donkey, the owners of it said to them, "Why are you loosing the young donkey?"

And they said, "The Lord has need of him." Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the young donkey, and they set Jesus on him. And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road.

Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying:

"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!"

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

(Luke 19:28-38)

So what else did they use to make a path for the Lord? They used their own clothes! Let's practice making a path for the Lord. We're going to use palm branches and clothes to do that.

It makes sense to make a path for the Lord. It's a way of saying, "Lord, we want you to come into our lives." But there is something extra special about saying that we want that so much, that we are going to take our nice clothes and lay them down in the dirt to make sure the Lord feels welcomed into our lives. Using palm branches doesn't cost you anything. But using your own clothes does mean giving something up, even if for only a little bit.

What are some of the things that we can give up, things we really like, so we can show the Lord just how much we want Him in our lives? These are like the clothes that were laid down to make a path for His entry as a king into the great city of Jerusalem.

Palm Sunday: The Coming Kingdom

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

28 March, 2021

Palm Sunday is a celebration of the Lord's kingship. Riding on a donkey was an ancient symbol of the king in Israel, and Jerusalem was the city of the king from the time of David. Riding on a donkey was also the fulfillment of a prophecy concerning the coming of a righteous king, to establish a new and powerful kingdom in Israel:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

Upon witnessing these signs of kingship the people responded accordingly: they tore palms from the trees and laid them on the road, they lay their garments down along with them, and escorted the Lord into the city as they shouted their acclamation of Him as their king:

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! (Luke 19:38)

Their clear expectation was that at last the rule of their oppressors was about to be thrown off and Jesus would usher in a new era of peace and prosperity.

Yet Jesus knew that their expectations were not in fact about to be fulfilled. He had no intention of taking on an Earthly kingdom. In fact, He foresaw disaster looming over Jerusalem:

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41-44)

From this passage we can see a stark contrast between the people's expectations of their immediate future and the coming reality that Jesus foresaw.

Although the people did not realize it at the time, Jesus had already begun to prepare them for disappointment. Right before He entered Jerusalem He told a parable, which is prefaced with this statement:

Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. (Luke 19:11)

In other words, His followers thought that His entering Jerusalem was the sign that the kingdom of God was on the verge of being established on the Earth, when in fact that reality was a long way off, and in fact would only ever happen in terms of a spiritual kingdom. The following parable that the Lord told reveals a great deal about expectations we have for the Lord, and how we deal with the disappointment of not having our expectations met.

I'll read the story in whole

Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, "Do business till I come.' But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us.'

[So right away we see the contrast with the events of Palm Sunday: the people expect Jesus to establish a kingdom here and now, but in the parable the nobleman actually goes to a faraway country to become king, leaving his servants behind. And He expects his servants to be working hard while he is gone. We also hear of those who wanted to prevent the man from going on to become king, foreshadowing the events of Jesus' trial and crucifixion.]

"And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, "Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' And he said to him, "Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, "Master, your mina has earned five minas.' Likewise he said to him, "You also be over five cities.'

"Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' And he said to him, "Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?'

"And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' (But they said to him, "Master, he has ten minas.')

"For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.' " (Luke 19:12-27)

There is much we could say about this story in isolation, but it takes on particular meaning in the context of Palm Sunday, that day of great expectations about to be dashed to pieces. When that disappointment came, and there was no new kingdom established on Earth with Jesus as king, the parable contained an important lesson for how the people ought to respond: they ought to have taken the inspiration and lessons the Lord had given them, and used them to work to grow the Lord's spiritual kingdom. And indeed, this is exactly what the early Christians did, spreading the

gospel far and wide through the world. But I am sure that there were also many followers of Jesus who were like the third servant in the parable: with Jesus crucified and ascended into heaven, and no earthly reward to speak of, they buried His teachings and went about life as normal. They may have been able to recollect Jesus' teachings, but when their expectations of reward was removed, they did not lift a finger to do anything with those teachings.

So what do we do when we have high expectations for the Lord that are not met? We certainly have times at which we believe that we have done everything according to the Lord's plan and it's only a matter of time before our lives drastically improve as a result. And although that does happen, we also need to be prepared for what to do if those hopes are disappointed. Take for instance a young man or woman who gets excited about marriage and following the Lord's rules, whether in preparing for marriage or as a young couple. And the expectation easily becomes, "if I follow the rules, it will all go smoothly and there will be few problems." But in spite of doing everything the "right way" challenges come up anyway, or the Lord seems distant, or doing things His way does not seem to work. Living for another person and denying oneself takes hard, gruelling work. And when there isn't the expected payoff right away it's disappointing. That disappointment easily becomes cynicism.

This is where parable comes in: when the Lord is away, do you work with what He's given you and make something of it, or do you put it aside until you can get a reward for doing something with it? The servant who simply put aside his master's money, and had nothing to show for it when the master returned, had even that taken away. Likewise, if in his or her cynicism a young person decides it's not worth it to pursue marriage the way the Lord intends, when the time comes they will have nothing to show for all the excitement they once had for it. On the other hand, those who have worked hard in spite of all the challenges and disappointments, as did the two other servants, will find themselves well-prepared to enter into a healthy and successful marriage.

So if Palm Sunday is all about false expectations, why do we celebrate it at all? Well it's not as simple as "they were all wrong." Jesus truly was a king, who truly was going to establish a kingdom, that truly would contain all blessedness and peace. But it was a spiritual kingdom, not an earthly one. Still it was important that the people at that time could have their superficial expectations. Without them, they never would have gotten far enough to enter into the truth, spiritual reality. In a sense, they needed to acclaim the Lord as an earthly king, as that acclamation would later transform into an acknowledgment of the Lord as their spiritual king. In fact, their celebration of the Lord on Palm Sunday was so important that when the Pharisees wanted Jesus to silence His supporters, He replied, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:40).

The Teachings of the New Church explain what would have happened if the Lord had dispelled His disciples illusions right away:

If they had been told that the word 'disciples' was not used to mean themselves but all people in whom the good of love and faith dwells, 3354, 3488, and also that in the Lord's kingdom there are no thrones, nor positions of government and dominion, as in the world, and that they would not be able to pass judgement on even the smallest aspect of any one person, 2129, 2553, they would have rejected that saying, and each would have left the Lord and gone back to his own employment. The reason why the Lord spoke in the way He did was so that they would receive those things and through them be

introduced into internal truths. For within the external truths which the Lord spoke internal truths lay stored away which in course of time are laid bare. And when these are laid bare those external truths are dispelled and serve solely as the objects or the means for thought about internal ones. (*Secrets of Heaven* §3857)

The Lord used the Disciples' excitement about an earthly kingdom to bring them along and engage them with His teachings; and when, in the course of time that expectation fell away, they were prepared to accept the reality of a spiritual kingdom.

This is just as true about our own naive hopes about what it means to follow the Lord. The Lord actually uses our superficial, selfish, wants to draw us into His church. He uses those same desires to get us excited and inspired about what's to come when we do as He says and follow His rules. If we go back to the example of marriage and how different it is from most people's expectations. And yet there is still something good and wholesome about a young person, so excited about all the wrong things when it comes to marriage, hopelessly misguided about what it will actually be like, yet still excited about marriage and wanting to give it a try! The fact that they are technically wrong does not take away from the good that it inspires them to do. And the same is true of all of us on our spiritual journeys. The Lord is leading us along by many high hopes that will go unfulfilled. That doesn't mean we should cynically reject all hope, or disparage those who still cling to some superficial hope. The real question is, when that hope is disappointed, will we be willing to work towards something greater, using the tools the Lord has given us, or will we sit back and wait, unwilling to go forward without some superficial motivation?

If we do the former, the Lord will give us something even greater than our wildest dreams: true joy in serving our neighbours, joy that wells up and overflows and last into eternity. That, if we are willing, is what can become of the expectations expressed in Palm Sunday.

Amen.