

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: The Meaning of Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday

Lesson: Matthew 21:1-11

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² 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. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵ "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" ⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ 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 heaven!" ¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Today is called Palm Sunday because when Jesus entered Jerusalem, many people spread their cloaks on the road and cut branches from palm trees and other trees to spread on the road, welcoming Jesus. Palm branches symbolize victory, so people were welcoming and worshiping Jesus, who had come as a savior to the earth, with palm branches. Interestingly, today is also called Passion Sunday along with Palm Sunday. As mentioned earlier, while palm branches represent "victory," passion is a far cry from victory. Passion has many meanings, but here it is used to mean "suffering." The difference in meaning between 'victory' and 'suffering' appears to be significant, so how can today be called both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday?

At that time, the people of Jerusalem had great expectations of Jesus because they had heard many rumors about him. You can understand

this if you have been listening to my sermons for the past few weeks. People heard unbelievable rumors about Jesus, such as that he healed the blind man from birth, and that he even raised Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, who had been dead for four days. In addition, people heard rumors that when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, heaven opened, a holy dove descended, and a voice from heaven said that Jesus was the beloved son of God, and that he had won the battle against Satan in the wilderness, and that he had fed 5,000 people (more than 20,000 people if we include women and children) with only two fish and five loaves. Among those rumors, what moved people's hearts and gave them hope was the rumor that Jesus did not discriminate against people, but fed the poor, healed the sick, and had relationships with Samaritans, Gentiles, tax collectors, and sinners, even eating with them at the same table.

Many people in Jerusalem, especially the poor, the sick, the sinners, and those who were discontent with the powerful, had new hope through Jesus and eagerly awaited to meet him. Therefore, when news of Jesus coming to Jerusalem spread, many people rushed to Jerusalem to meet him and waited for him at the entrance of the city. They were waiting for Jesus to liberate them from the pain, poverty, disease, and inequality of their lives.

However, as always, God's will and people's thoughts, as well as Jesus' will and people's thoughts, were different. The image that people had of Christ at that time was that of a king. Therefore, they would have imagined Jesus entering Jerusalem in regal clothing, riding a grand and healthy white or black horse. However, the Jesus they encountered was not magnificent and did not come riding on a grand and healthy horse. Jesus entered Jerusalem on an extremely humble and lowly young donkey. Moreover, that donkey was one brought from a poor village called Bethphage on the Mount of Olives.

By the way, Bethphage was a very poor village that means "House of unripe figs". People do not eat unripe fruit as it is very difficult for a person to eat. Unripe fruits have no commercial value as well. The reason why the village was called the House of unripe figs was that the people living there were very poor and survived by eating unripe figs. Quiz! So, how would the young donkey brought from Bethphage have appeared to the people of Jerusalem? Did it look healthy? Or did it look small, emaciated, and unimpressive because it couldn't eat well?

The Jesus that the people of Jerusalem faced was very humble, riding on a donkey, which was far from their expectations and imagination of a king-like figure in splendid clothes, riding on a majestic horse. I believe the description of Jesus entering Jerusalem and people waving palm branches to welcome him is an example of how different God's will is from human thoughts. Narratives like these that show God's will continue to appear in the Bible.

For example, when Samuel went to Jesse's house to anoint a new king according to God's word, Jesse had eight sons. Samuel and the people there thought he would anoint Eliab, Jesse's oldest son. However, God's plan was not Eliab, but the youngest son David, who was outside taking care of the sheep. David was even a boy. Later, during Israel's war with the Philistines, all of Israel's soldiers were afraid of the giant Goliath, who was insulting Israel and God. But David, in the name of God, fought and defeated Goliath. Like this, God's plan is different from our thoughts, as God looks on the heart. These kinds of narratives showing God's will continue throughout the Bible.

The reason today is called Passion Sunday is simple. After Jesus entered Jerusalem, he was betrayed by his disciples, naked, tortured and mocked by soldiers, and finally hung on the cross. The people who welcomed Jesus by waving palm branches were incited by their leaders and could not understand Jesus, who was dying on the cross in a lowly manner. However, Jesus endured all this suffering after his entry into Jerusalem

because he truly came to this earth as the Son of God and to accomplish God's will. In this way, Jesus carried all the sorrows, pains, sufferings, and sins of this world as the Lamb of God and completed the salvation of all mankind through his resurrection. Therefore, although people's expectations and Jesus' life were different, Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection were the true path to victory and salvation.

Therefore, today is called Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. From today, Holy Week, also known as Passion week, begins. Let us remember the love of Jesus Christ, who gave his life to us for salvation, and I pray that we have Holy Week and Passion Week sharing the love of Christ with our neighbors. Amen.