

Call to Worship

Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in God's Holy Name.  
**Hosanna in the highest heaven! Come, let us worship.**

Prayer of Invocation

**Wondrous God, because of your great love, you have come to us in Jesus. In him you still come into the noise, confusion, uproar and sin of our lives. It is with amazement and joy we acknowledge your presence in Christ who walks the road of this life with us, and for us. Lord Jesus, we lift our faces, our hearts and our voices to you, with hope and trust. Intrude in our lives this day. Amen.**

The Word

Mark 1:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'"

**They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.**

Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

**Then 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.**

Living the Word

**Tell you a story of Jesus:** Today is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week; the Week of the year that we walk to the cross with Jesus. He was on a mission, the time had come, and he was determined to go into the city of Jerusalem and whatever he must go through there.

Think of the nastiest job you have to do. The one you put off because you really don't want to. Cleaning the toilet or the oven or that basement, garage or closet, raking those leaves, getting out the summer clothes and putting away winter. Now you know it will be a blessing to have it complete, you also know it just has to be done or it will not be good.

Days or weeks ahead you plan by organizing the tools for the job: the gloves, trash bags, the cleanser, the totes, whatever you will need for this horrible project. Next you steel yourself and plan the date and time, determined to complete this task, no matter what it takes. Finally at the appointed time you forge ahead and just do it!

Jesus is focused, knowing what needs to be done, he has preplanned this, his final trip into Jerusalem, it is the beginning of the end of the worst of it. Jesus, as a practicing Jew, regularly went up to Jerusalem for the great feasts. Everyone that could, tried to be in Jerusalem for the Passover, an annual pilgrimage for the Jews.

It was a time like our Christmas and Easter when they would gather with family and friends to celebrate with food and story. It was about remembering part of their history. The story of God sending Moses to face Pharaoh and requesting for the Hebrew people held in slavery to be freed.

As the story goes, Pharaoh would agree and then at the last minute harden his heart and change his mind, so 10 plagues came upon the land: Blood, frogs, gnats, flies, death of the livestock, boils, hail, locust, darkness and the death of each first born child. But God passed over the Hebrew people and only afflicted the Egyptians, thus it is a celebration of the Pass-over of God.

Even today this freedom is celebrated by God's people as the Passover meal. In past years we have celebrated on Thursday evening the Passover Seder Meal here at HUMC. It was during this meal that Jesus broke bread with the disciples in the Upper Room during that last week, and instituted the act and service of Holy Communion.

The disciples were nervous as they approached Jerusalem. They had been steering clear for a while of this city of Roman power and dominance; of religiosity by the rules and authority of the Jewish High Priests as rumors and threats on Jesus ministry and life were floating around.

They thought this was to be a Jewish militant takeover of the city, led by Jesus. There were thousands of Jews present and they could feel the tension in the air. They thought that the Romans would be crushed and God would bring all of the Jews to understanding and they would now follow Jesus. Yet, they were trusting Jesus to handle all the details – which he did.

You know that 'edge of your seat anticipation' you sometimes feel during a movie, or while reading a good book? When they first came out, a friend shared with me about the book 'The Hunger Games'. She said it was one of those stories that you want to know what will happen next, but you don't want to get to the end of the book because then it will be over. The anticipation of what is to come...I read that whole series and every book made me feel that way.

Like this Gospel story I share with you this morning, The Hunger Games is about imposed violence and the challenge for creating peace in the midst; to live another way. The Hunger games is fiction, but for the Jesus story, we have the 'inside scoop,' we know how the story will progress. We have 'Gospel colored glasses,' looking back through what was written for us by the Gospel Writers.

We know what is to come during this final week of Jesus' human life. We want to shout 'don't go, we don't want to watch the humiliation of them mocking you in that crown of thorns; not our Jesus. We don't want to feel the misery of the whip on you as you receive the lashes. We sure don't want to watch them pound nails through your hands and feet. We don't want to see you hanging from the cross.'

**The preplanning** Marks version of the Palm Parade story that we read this morning, is over half about securing the colt. Jesus didn't leave things to the last minute. He knew what he was going to do.

Long ago secured, Jesus had preplanned by arranging ahead with people he could trust for the use of a colt when the time would come. He had planned the route of the entry strategically to coincide with the flood of pilgrims entering the city that week. God had a plan and Jesus was carrying it all out.

This must have made the disciples nervous, as a couple of them are sent to bring back an unriden colt, just inside the village limits. If you get caught in the act, tell them the Lord needs it. Have you ever been sent on an errand, that you didn't understand, and hope no one would see you along the way? That would make me nervous. So, of course, they go and find the colt, and of course, someone questions them.

You know that guilty look a person has when they aren't sure if what they are doing is wrong or not. Jesus would have just gone and taken the colt with confidence, but we are talking about some young adults who aren't sure what is going on or what will happen next. Imagine their surprise and relief as the bystanders who question them say "Oh sure, go ahead and take it."

**The parade** Now-a-days a man riding a colt or a donkey would be amusing at the very least. But in the time of Jesus it was the beast of Kings, especially a King who comes in peace. For a beast to be used for a sacred purpose, it must never have been used for any other purpose. A leisure ride for royalty, to express they didn't have to walk like everyone else and they were on their own time and agenda, with authority. Jesus' action was a deliberate, dramatic claim to be the Messiah. It was an unspoken message to the Jewish pilgrims entering the city around him that he was the one they had been waiting for.

The people were shouting "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" We can shout that as we know it to be what he truly was and why he came. But that was what the people of Jerusalem were greeting all of the pilgrims with. A sort of "Welcome to our city, our Temple and the festival."

But in addition to this the words 'he that cometh' were also used to refer to the awaited Messiah. Those who knew Jesus, the disciples and all who had heard his teachings, saw his miracles, and knew his ministry, were, as Jews, also heading for Jerusalem and the Temple for The celebration of Passover. They were shouting "Hosanna!" which means 'save, please' or 'save now!' A cry to God to break in and to save God's people, now that the Messiah had come.

The mood was festive, the people had reached Jerusalem and had come for an annual party. So a seemingly spontaneous parade was easy to buy into. The whole picture is of a populace who misunderstood. Like an April Fool's joke gone bad. They thought he had come as the Messiah to conquer the oppressive powers. No one thought he came with peace, not violence in his heart. Even so, we know that Jesus did ride in as King.

As he made his way into Jerusalem, with the people shouting, the children waving palm branches and some even paving the road for him with their cloaks, the disciples were at his side, but they were still nervous, Because of the climate of the times, they might have expected Jesus to sneak into the city and avoid being seen and recognized, instead of getting the attention of everyone focused on him. But Jesus had done just about everything to be visible to any and all.

**Into The Temple** The drama continued all the way to the Temple. Why the Temple? Because this was the place of God for the people. Jesus had to come and review the situation before him, knowing that his next visit there wouldn't be pleasant. He came to draw strength from this place, though not from the priests, he was seeking God. He didn't stay long, just long enough to take in all of it and they left.

The Disciples were still with him at this point, despite the impending danger, but they had to be nervously looking around and jumpy, anxious to get back out of the city and to the outlying village of Bethany. When they got back to where they were staying, they must have wiped their brows and said, "Whew we made it." We can only imagine the tension of this day and the days to come. But we can see the drama playing out according to how God had made the plan with Christ for things to happen.

Jesus is still focused, not on the mocking or the lashes of the whip or the nails or the cross. Jesus is focusing on the message of peace and love for us that the cross enabled him to give. He is preplanning how the resurrection will open a door of life after death for us. He knows that this day is the 'beginning of the end' for us: the end of having to live in our sin, having to live in violence, having to grieve for those who die, because we can believe that there is life beyond.

Jesus could see through eternity colored glasses. Jesus can see through the times of us being mocked and the times we feel like we are being whipped and the times we feel like there are nails piercing our skin. Jesus goes with us, through it all. and remember the cross is now empty, Jesus isn't suffering any more, except with us as we travel through life. We too can look forward to a new life of resurrection after each of our hard places on the journey, even after death.

And so for that night he was able to return to Bethany with the disciples to await the next step of this journey. We so often skim over the stories of Jesus, we tell the good and happy parts, but leave out the anxiety in the midst of the tension. We do it for the children, not to scare them, but as adults we need to go deeper into the stories in order to understand what we can, of the actual events.

How would it be to have been one of the disciples? What would it have been like to have totally misunderstood the triumphal entry? When did the reality hit for these people? Was it not until the cross? Or did many never understand until years or decades later as the word of God came clear through this story of Jesus? Many things happened during that next seven days. But Jesus gave them a talisman for them to hold on to: The bread and the cup to be a symbol of remembrance of the story of God through Christ.

Every first Sunday of the month, we come to share in that meal once again. It is here so you might live into what it means to be one of the disciples of Christ. If that makes you nervous, I guess it should, because given the chance, Jesus can take you places you would never expect in order to accomplish the will of God. Next Sunday, on Easter morning, as you receive the bread and cup, can you say in your heart to God "Lord, I want to be a disciple."