

Texts: Mark 11:1-11; 14:3-9

Subject: Triumphal Entry, Jesus Anointed

Theme: Love All the Way

Palm Sunday; Apr. 5, 2020, Online Worship; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus,
Amen.

Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! When was it in your life that someone showed up at just the right time, and did something unexpected? Who was it that gifted you in a way that no one else could? Think about that for a minute. When our family moved away to Iowa to attend seminary almost 10 years ago, we were blessed by a congregation that cared about us, and supported us. They took great efforts to raise funds for us to pay for tuition and expenses. Things were very tight for our little family of four at the time already, and we were not sure what to expect from the experience. Ivy told me, "if we go through this for four years, and you don't become a pastor, we're going to have problems." I can't blame her - there was so much we couldn't have anticipated. We were excited, but we didn't know how this would end. There was another member in that church that set up a recurring gift every month through the bank, and sent us a check every single month for four years. There were so many times that we wondered if we would make it through a month, to get bills paid or get what we needed, and that gift showed up at just the right time. It also meant we could sometimes get a night out to have dinner or see a movie, or go out with friends and classmates. I will never forget that gesture of love and support. It meant a lot to know there were people that believed in me, and cared so much, and expected great things, even when we didn't know what to expect.

Mark's Gospel tells the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and we hear the people shouting Hosanna! They're saying something like, "Come Save Us!" "Save now!" "Save us we pray!" They were laying their coats on the dusty road - you didn't do that for just anyone. They were waving branches, or stalks from the fields, something done only to celebrate a royal presence. Fulfilling prophecy, Jesus rides on an animal that has never been ridden by anyone else. The people on the road would have recognized this as the King coming into the city - to do something extraordinary. What did they expect? Maybe He would overturn the ruling establishment, maybe he would feed people, maybe he would bring healing. They had heard about him as one who did those things. Their actions demonstrate that they believe Jesus to be real royalty - one who would be a new King - who would free the people from the empire - from Roman rule - and would begin a new dynasty.

This day usually includes some of that excitement for us, as the season of Lent comes to an end, and we look forward to lilies, family gatherings, and a full church on Easter morning. We want to hear the trumpets sound, the organ at a full roar, and see the ones we love and hold them close. But this year is different. For now, we stay home, we take precautions, for our safety and the safety of others, mindful that so many are fighting infections, and so many people have died in our country from the Coronavirus. We will get there. We will be together again. We can look forward to that future.

We hear the people shouting, "Come save us!" and we can relate. They're asking for a transformation of their reality. They're depending on this King to bring about a change - they're asking for it. By now, the disciples believe Jesus is the Messiah, and still they struggle to know what it means for them. Two days before the passover, they

were outside the city in the town of Bethany, eating dinner at the home of Simon the Leper - likely someone who received healing from Jesus - but they still call him by that name, even though he was transformed and freed of his disease. Even after being welcomed as a King, he's eating with folks with whom a King probably wouldn't have been expected to share a table. There at the home of the former Leper, Jesus is at the table with his friends, when an unnamed woman shows up with a jar of ointment - anointing oil - and pours it on Jesus' head. It seems strange in our context, so let's take a look at what this is. Anointing, we hear in scripture, was done for a couple of reasons. We hear about David being anointed by the prophet when he was a shepherd in the book of Samuel. This was to show that he was chosen by God. It was done as ritual to prepare him to become King. Typically the only other time someone might be anointed would be because they were dead or dying. This ritual was done to prepare a body for burial. At least one bible scholar has wondered if maybe it could also be seen as a generous act of hospitality for an honored guest. Could be.

That jar though, was worth nearly a year's wages! We can remember when Jesus fed the 5,000, one of the disciples said it would take 200 denarii to feed all those people, so we can expect that a jar worth 300 denarii could be sold to feed 7500 people! The disciples see this and begin to get angry. They were talking to each other, wondering why this woman would be so wasteful. They scold her. Jesus interrupts to praise her for doing a good thing, saying, "She has anointed my body beforehand for its burial." Jesus names what the disciples feared the most: death is on the way.

The onlookers seem upset. Shouldn't Jesus be all about helping the poor? Isn't that what His life and ministry are all about? They say she's made a selfish decision and

being to shame her. They might have been right. I wonder if they would have thought that way before they met Jesus. In their time with Him, how have *they* been changed by His power and presence? Jesus could have agreed, but the oil had been poured. The choice was either to praise her for what she had done, or to curse her. Jesus wasn't going to do that. Jesus showed her great love. He *knew* his life was at risk in Jerusalem, and had already predicted his death and resurrection three times. His words cast her in the best light, and even more, give her a legacy: wherever the good news is proclaimed, she will be remembered. Judas would betray him. Peter would deny him. As we approach Holy Week we remember this woman once again. She showed great love to Jesus as he moved toward the cross. This King and Messiah shows *love all the way* to the cross for her sake, and for ours.

Now, *our* lives have been upended - interrupted by infection, fear, and death. As we continue to stay at home, keep our distance, work for the safety and health of others, we wait for something to change. But we have already been changed. We aren't staying home out of fear or selfishness, but out of our care for others. We wait for a cure, a treatment, a reprieve from the climbing numbers of infections and horrible losses we have seen over the last few months. We wait faithfully, trusting that the love of God we have known will always be with us, that faith in Jesus brings us with him into a new existence here and now, even as we suffer. In the meantime, the stories of love are the ones that shake us. *We hear love* when we hear of people giving up their respirators so others can use them and live, of the countless nurses and doctors working themselves to the bone to care for patients whose families cannot be with them in the hospitals, of

teachers and supermarket employees and neighbors going the extra mile to get people what they need.

This Palm Sunday may be different for us, and none of us like to be away from our loved ones, our church, our work, and our schools. We may be physically distanced, but we are still connected, still together, still the body of Christ in the world. We are welcoming the King to come to us again, shouting “Hosanna! Come and save us!” in big ways - curing our diseases, healing our sick, helping us stand when we cannot work one more hour; and in small ways - as we play with our children, as we prepare meals, as we enjoy moments of silence.

Think again about that one who showed up for you, who showed love to you when you needed it most. Even if you don't have a particular person in mind, that's ok. Jesus is that One for all of us, who shows up to take on our flesh, our earthly existence, who becomes frail and fragile like we are, and then does what is truly needed for us. Jesus is the One who sees us and finds us, loves us and transforms us, in spite of ourselves, not because of anything we've done or will do, but because of His grace and mercy. Jesus loves us as one of us, and makes us His own. Jesus dies to save us and welcome us into a new existence - a new reality beyond disease and suffering, loss and grief. He does it because we need it and cannot get it anywhere else.

Other kings rode horses, other kings conquered nations, other kings ruled through fear and displays of power. Anointed beforehand for his death, this One is different. He will free His people through the power of a cross, will die there for a world that betrays and denies Him, will be raised from the grave and rule with beauty and justice from heaven and in the hearts of all who trust in Him. There is no other King like

this. Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior has come and is still coming to us, still showing love all the way.

Let us pray.

Holy God, through your Son, Jesus, come and save us. Save us now. Heal our wounds, deliver us from disease, and bless this creation once more. You have claimed us in baptism. Remind us all of our beloved-ness. You have made us one people in You, remind us all of our connectedness to one another and to you through Your Holy Spirit. Lead us through this holy week, feed us in Your Word, and help us to be open to the new life you are bringing us every day, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.