

## Lord, Save Us

Scriptures: Leviticus 23:4-8; Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 31:1-5; John 12:12-19

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The air was electrified with the events of recent days. If anyone was looking for a sign from Jesus, they could not have missed the miracle at Bethany. The drama had played itself out before the eyes of family and friends who had gathered to mourn the death of Lazarus. Four days had passed before Jesus arrived. All hope had been abandoned. Moved to tears because of the death of his friend, Jesus led the mourners to the tomb and called Lazarus back to life. Is it any wonder that the Pharisees angrily complained that the whole world had gone after Him?

During the week that followed, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus had prepared a feast for Jesus at the end of the Sabbath. It is at that dinner that two “telling events” happen. The first is the anointing of Jesus by Mary as she takes a bottle of perfume that would have cost a year’s wages and pours it over the feet of Jesus. She then bows before Him and dries his feet with her hair. Jesus comments that she has, in effect, anointed Him before his death. The second event gives us a window into the true character of Judas Iscariot. It is Judas who protests what Mary has done. He suggests that if Mary wanted to use the value of this perfume appropriately, she would not have used it on the feet of Jesus. She would have sold it and given him the money to give to the poor. John tells us that Judas only said this because he was the treasurer for the disciples and he often embezzled money from their funds for his personal use.

On the day after the Sabbath, on Sunday, Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. It will be his last journey up to Jerusalem before his crucifixion. It is early in the final week. The players for Friday’s drama are all in position.

- The cross and the spikes await.
- The branches from the thorn tree are waiting to be woven into a crown.
- The Centurion is ready to oversee the crucifixion.
- Annas and Caiaphas have already decided that this Man must die so that they can keep their positions of status and power. They fear that two groups of people will now follow Jesus instead of them – those who witnessed the raising of Lazarus and those who have heard about it.
- Judas Iscariot is silent in the presence of Jesus.
- Pilot will see Jesus as innocent, but will guard his position as ruler over Israel.

This is the week that Jesus, with his disciples and his family, will celebrate his last Passover on earth. This is the week that prophecies from hundreds of years before will be fulfilled. It seems that only Jesus knows or understands the end from the beginning. He has told his disciples what will happen, but they do not understand. He has told them that He will rise again, but how will that happen?

Jesus finally told the disciples that after his return to heaven the “Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in his name will help them to understand all things, and bring to their remembrance all that He has told them.” (John 14:26)

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem from the East, traveling over the Mount of Olives, word of His coming has preceded Him. The disciples who are with Him are soon joined by the crowds that have come out to meet Him. Throngs of people from every nation have now crowded into Jerusalem for the Passover. The rumors have spread about the raising of Lazarus. Of course they want to see this miracle worker. They can only hope that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah who will throw off Roman rule and establish once

again the kingdom of David in the land. For generation after generation the people of Israel had waited for the promised Messiah.

- They were a people who knew both how to rejoice and how to be in despair.
- They had experienced God's redemption from slavery in Egypt and they had experienced the conquering army of Babylon.
- They had known peace and they had known war.
- They were a people who longed for a powerful king who would establish God's people and create a kingdom on earth that could not be conquered, a kingdom so magnificent that all the world would come just to see it.

The people along the way strip the palm fronds from the trees and throw them down in His path as a matter of honor as they would for any king who was entering the city. Palm branches were a symbol of national triumph and victory.

There had been others who wanted to force Jesus to become their king. After the feeding of the 5000, Jesus had withdrawn into the mountains to prevent the people from taking Him by force and making Him the King of Israel. The crowd today welcomes Jesus as a national hero, not a Messiah who will be crucified. Jesus is indeed the King, but not a warrior King. Unlike the conquering military hero, David, Jesus comes into Jerusalem riding, not on a magnificent stallion, but on a donkey, a sign of humility and peace.

Jesus is

- not the political zealot who will overthrow the oppressive Roman government;
- not the earthy king who will establish a political kingdom;
- not the conquering hero whom they have expected.

Instead, Jesus is the weeping Son of God. At one point this week Jesus will sit on the hillside overlooking the city of Jerusalem and say, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! (Luke 13:34)

Jesus is the weeping Messiah:

- weeping because those who are shouting to Him do not recognize Him as more than a miracle worker;
- weeping because they continue to live without hope;
- weeping because they do not accept Him for who He is;
- weeping because some of those who are cheering for Him today will be in the crowd at the end of the week shouting "Crucify Him."

Let's join the crowd. We are not so different from those around us who have found life at times to be tedious and difficult and disappointing. We are a people who at times find ourselves weighed down by circumstances that we cannot control or explain.

We stand here in the crowd along the road to Jerusalem, a people who often need someone in our lives to help us deal with our pain, and our grief, and our challenges. We need someone to give us comfort and peace and hope. Like those around us on the roadside, we are a religious people, but we have found

that it is the *relationship* with the Messiah that will help us live our lives to the fullest. As we look at this Man who we know to be the Son of God, we see Him as

- the One who provides,
- the One who heals,
- the One who is our righteousness and our peace,
- the One who is present with us,
- the Exalted and Eternal One,
- our Shepherd who meets our needs,
- Emmanuel, God with us.

During this Holy Week we will again hear Jesus asking us that question that He asked his disciples, “Who do YOU say that I am?”

The celebration of Palm Sunday by the Church should be a moment of communal reflection on the identity of Jesus. When the Church celebrates Palm Sunday correctly it is doing the very thing that is reported about the disciples. John reports that it was only after the resurrection of Jesus that they remembered, with understanding, all that Jesus had told them. The Church is called to reflection and an understanding of Jesus that comes with faith. Palm Sunday is intended to be not merely the commemoration of a past event; it is rather the *worshipful remembrance* through which Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem becomes real for us in our present day. The life of the Church comes from the life and love of Jesus.

A second question follows the one about who Jesus is. He now asks, “What will you DO with me?” We know what the answer should be. Jesus told us, as He told his disciples. Clearly Jesus said, “If any person would follow Me, let that person take up their cross daily and follow Me.” It is a cross of commitment to Jesus. The only purpose for a cross is death. For us it is not physical death, but it is the removal of anything that prevents us from becoming the person in relationship with Jesus that was intended by God for us.

Today we enter into Holy Week. We will fix our minds on Jesus. We will observe Maundy Thursday, the night of the Passover Meal and the arrest of Jesus, with a service here in the sanctuary. We will come aside at noon on Friday, Good Friday, to listen to the last words of Jesus as He was crucified. And then we will come to worship on Sunday for the great celebration of Resurrection Day.

During this week let us make time to spend time with Jesus.

Make time to spend in reflection upon the events of the week and the grace that is ours, even ours, because of the death and resurrection of our Lord.

Amen.