

Palm Sunday
Matthew 21:1-11
April 9 & 10, 2017

What grabs your attention? Is it a number of fire trucks going the same direction? I've been known to follow, at a safe distance, to see where they might be going. Is it the weather? I've been known to sit inside the garage and watch the lightning or look out the doors when there has been a tornado warning. Have you ever slowed down at the scene of an accident? Of course, you wish to slow down and get safely around it. Yet, there is a part of us that wants to see what happened.

It isn't always disasters that grab our attention. If you have ever been at a national park, you know how that works. A line of cars ahead of you is stopping and pulling off and cameras begin to stick out the window. There must be something there. Your eyes begin to look around to see what everyone else is looking at. What's there? What are they all looking at? Finally, you get a quick glimpse of a bear among the trees. If you really want to grab someone's attention, just put the word "free" in front of it. What grabs your attention?

Jesus grabbed the attention of those who were in Jerusalem. Jerusalem would be packed with people coming to celebrate the Passover. People had come from all over the country and the world to celebrate the Passover. Some historians have estimated that as many as 2 ½ million people were in Jerusalem. The Passover was that festival that the Jews were to celebrate to remember how God had saved his people from the tenth and final plague that God had brought upon the nation of Egyptians because Pharaoh would not let God's people go.

This Passover was different. Matthew tells us that **"the whole city was stirred."** The word that he uses for **"stirred"** is the same word that we get our word, *Seismic*. Jesus was shaking things up. There were the miracles that he had done. He fed thousands of people from a boy's simple lunch. He opened the eyes of the blind. He cured those who had leprosy. But the miracle that had grabbed people's attention was that of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus had died. He was buried. He had been buried for four days. They rolled the stone away that had sealed the tomb. Jesus called to Lazarus for him to come out. He came walking out.

John talks about how much Lazarus had grabbed the attention of people. It was the day before Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we call *Palm Sunday*. When people found out that Jesus was at the home of Mary and Martha, and that both Jesus and Lazarus were there. It grabbed people's attention. A bunch of people left Jerusalem to find them. They especially wanted to see this man named Lazarus and Jesus who raised him from the dead. But the Jewish leaders now felt so threatened by Lazarus that they now **"made plans to kill Lazarus as well."** Why? John tells us: **"for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him."** (John 12:11) It didn't take the crowds long to find Jesus.

Both that day and the next, Jesus wanted to send a message to the leaders who wanted him dead. He wanted them to know who he was and what he was coming to do. The prophet Zachariah had described how this Messiah would come: **"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.'" No doubt there were people who saw Jesus that day had no idea who Jesus was. Jesus had grabbed their attention, and they wanted to see what everyone saw in Jesus. Jesus wanted to make it clear who he was and what he had come to do. Many had asked: "Who is this?"**

This is the most important question that can ever be asked or answered. It is the question of the ages. Who is this man, Jesus of Nazareth? Where did he come from? What has he done? What is he doing? What will he do? What does he mean for me, for us, for everyone?

"Who Is This Jesus?"

Jesus wanted to clearly tell people who he was. There was a lot of symbolism that day as Jesus came into Jerusalem. The donkey was considered an animal of peace, versus the horse, which was an animal of war. Jesus' entry to Jerusalem would have thus symbolized his entry into as the Prince of Peace. Palm branches symbolized goodness and victory. Palm

branches and coats being laid on the ground to indicate that a king or dignitary was arriving in victory or triumph. They shouted **“Hosanna”** – a word that means *“save us” or “save us now.”* **Who is this?** What kind of King did Jesus come to be? This is the King of Kings who comes to bring peace and victory and save this world from its sins.

Many of the people in the crowd that day were looking for a different kind of king. They were looking for a king that would once again restore their nation. They were looking for a king who would make all things in their lives good again. It was so easy on that day to get caught up in the excitement of that day and shout hosanna’s and lay down palm branches and coats. But what will it be like by the end of this week? You know what we are going to see on Friday of this week? We’re going to see what it looks like a helpless and pitiful Jesus. We will see a body that was beaten and bloody. We will see a body hanging on a cross by nails through hand and feet. Instead of shouting *“Hosanna’s”* crowds will be shouting *“crucify him, crucify him.”* For many, their hopes would be dashed because Jesus was not the king that they had expected.

But he was exactly the king that they had needed. Isn’t it amazing what our King will do for us? The same King who created this world will die for this world. The King who could crush this world with a single word lets this world crush him. This king did not come into this world and take away all the bad things in life. Why didn’t the people in that crowd get it? Why don’t we get it? Jesus did not come to take away all the Alzheimer disease in this world. He doesn’t always stop a car from going through a red light and hit another. He doesn’t promise us that we won’t get laid off in our jobs. He doesn’t say that natural disasters are not going to harm us.

If you have ever had any of those thoughts, then we need to remember that our faith is not based on some feeling. It is not based on the fact that things go well for us or not. Our faith is based on the fact that Jesus came to live in your place and die for your sins! Your sins are paid because of what this King has done for you. As we celebrate Easter next week, the empty tomb guarantees that what Jesus does on the cross is complete. Your sins ARE paid for. Your guilt is gone. He opens the gates of heaven for you.

Palm Sunday is one of those Sundays of the year that grabs people’s attention. The palms, the children singing, the special music are all great. But that isn’t why we celebrate it. We celebrate it because our King comes to bring peace and victory. Our king comes to save. Our King comes to open wide the gates of heaven. Who is this? This is Christ, the Son of God. Amen.