

JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM
 (or, “Are You Willing to Trust Jesus?”)
 Mark 11:1-11 NRSV
 April 5, 2009 – Palm Sunday and
 LSC’s Last Sunday
 Oakland Avenue PCUSA-Rock Hill
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MARK 11:1-11 (NRSV):

- 1 *When they were approaching Jerusalem at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples*
- 2 *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.*
- 3 *If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’”*
- 4 *They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it,*
- 5 *some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?”*
- 6 *They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.*
- 7 *Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.*
- 8 *Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.*
- 9 *then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting: “**Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!***
- 10 ***Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”***
- 11 *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.*

The Sunday School teacher was trying to see how much her children knew about the Bible. “How many of you are familiar with King Solomon?” she asked. One little girl raised her hand and responded:

“Oh, I know all about King Solomon...he liked women and animals!”

“King Solomon liked women and animals,” repeated the teacher. Intrigued, she pressed the point: “How in the world do you know that King Solomon liked women and animals?” The little girl replied:

“Well, the Bible says that King Solomon had 1000 wives...and 300 porcupines!” (concubines)

Now, I do not know how many of you are familiar with your Bibles, but I do know that familiarity with a passage of Scripture may often make us miss a Word from God! When someone begins to read the 23rd Psalm or to tell *The Story of the Prodigal Son*, there is often a tendency for us to shut off our minds unintentionally because we think that we know all about what is to be read or told.

Today’s passage of Scripture is so familiar that its familiarity may cause us to mishear a Word from God. I doubt that there is anyone here who has not heard again and again this story in today’s passage in Mark.

Today in our church calendar is called **PALM SUNDAY** because of this passage where the crowds are waving “leafy branches” or Palm Tree branches in the air. Many triumphant hymns have been written in celebration of Palm Sunday, including the one with which we began today’s worship service.

Written some 1100 years ago in the year 821 by St. Theodulph, probably while he was in prison in France, the hymn connotes the pageantry of a parade and the majesty of a king. Listen:

*All glory, laud, and honor
To Thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring...
Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David’s royal Son,
Who in the Lord’s name comest,
The King and Blessed One.*
[The Presbyterian Hymnal, #88]

Today’s passage in Mark relates this familiar story of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem which is also told in each of the other three gospels.

It was a familiar story.

It must have been one of those important stories about Jesus that the church wanted to be sure to remember!

It was a story that carried with it some deep roots in the Hebrew Bible.

One of the Hebrew Bible roots involved the prophet ZECHARIAH.

Over 500 years before the time of Jesus, the Jews returned from exile in Babylonia and faced even more destruction from “*the Warhorse of the Greeks*” – Alexander the Great. The prophet ZECHARIAH offered the people **HOPE** that would come in a person of tremendous **CONTRAST TO THAT OF** Alexander the Great:

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you:
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on an ass,
on a colt, the foal of an ass.*
[Zechariah 9:9; RSV]

*I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the warhorse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.*
[Zechariah 9:10; RSV]

Another of the Hebrew Bible roots of this story involved The Book of Psalms. A part of one of them was read earlier [in the service]. It was **Psalm 118** which is said to have been Martin Luther’s favorite Psalm. It was one of those psalms or hymns that was used by the Jews in worship, particularly during the Season of Passover. As a matter of fact, there is some Christian tradition which says that Psalm 118 was the hymn that was sung by Jesus and his disciples following the Last Supper in the Upper Room. (cf.: Rhodes, Arnold B, The Layman’s Bible Commentary on Psalms, Atlanta, John Knox Press, p. 157)

At any rate, **verse #26** in Psalm 118 made up the shout of the crowds in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday:

“Blessed be He who enters in the name of the Lord!”

Now, the reason that I have called our attention to these deep roots in the Hebrew Bible in both **Zechariah** and **Psalms** in terms of today’s familiar story of Palm Sunday is so that we can understand that **Jesus’ entry** into Jerusalem was His way of publicly announcing that He was the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, whose coming had been foretold again and again in the Hebrew Bible.

One time when I lived in Anderson, SC, I worked at Central PCUSA, and I took some international students to visit a textile mill. (It was, incidentally, the first time that **I** had ever been inside a textile mill, although I had grown up with textile mills all around me!). At one point we found ourselves watching a cloth checker at work.

The cloth checker stood at the end of the entire mill process where the finished product, white cloth, was being wound into a huge bolt of cloth. The cloth came continuously down from the ceiling to be wound, and the cloth checker watched that cloth flowing past, much as you would stand at the bottom of a waterfall, watching the water cascade over the cliff down toward you. And the cloth checker did that for eight hours a day!

Occasionally, the cloth checker would stop the cloth in its movement down and mark with a crayon a section of the cloth which needed further, closer scrutiny by someone else.

This morning, for a few moments, I want us to take this familiar Palm Sunday story and mark a section of it for a closer look. The part of the story which I would have us study more closely is the borrowing of the colt upon which Jesus was to ride into Jerusalem.

Matthew Henry lived over 300 years ago in England. He was a preacher in the Church of England, and he wrote a set of commentaries in 1706 on the books of the bible. It just so happens that I own a set of this 18th century work, and I want to read to you one of the things that he says about today’s passage----written in 1706!

.....he rode upon an ass’s colt, which being an ass, looked contemptible, made no figure; and being but a colt whereon never man sat, we may suppose, was rough and untrimmed, and not only so, but rude and ungovernable, and would disturb and disgrace the solemnity. This colt was borrowed, too. Christ went upon the water in a borrowed boat, ate the Passover in a borrowed chamber, was buried in a borrowed sepulchre, and here rode on a borrowed ass. (*JTR - And then, after this comment, Matthew Henry admonishes his readers*): Let not

Christians scorn to be beholden one to another, and, when need is, to go a borrowing, for our Master did not (*JTR - scorn to be beholden*). (Henry's Exposition, Vol. #5, Philadelphia, Towar and Hogan, 1828, p. 411)

Now, you can deal with this incident of the borrowed colt in one of two ways. One is not better than the other; neither will one get you closer to heaven than the other!

One way to deal with how the colt was borrowed is simply to say that it was God's will that Jesus borrow that particular colt and therefore nobody was going to question the disciples' untying it and bringing it back to Jesus to use. In the story, when someone does question it, the disciples' simple answer seems acceptable enough:

"The Lord has need of it and will send it back immediately."

The other way to deal with the story is to say that the Palm Sunday Parade was planned and that Jesus had made prior arrangements with a friend or one of his followers to borrow his colt. King Herod was out to "get" Jesus, so a code was agreed upon to insure that Jesus got the colt. The code or password was in the sentence:

"The Lord has need of it and will send it back immediately."

Now, I do not know which way you will choose in understanding this incident, but the intriguing question that was raised for me in the incident was the question:

WHAT IF NO ONE HAD BEEN WILLING TO TRUST JESUS?

Would it have meant that Jesus could not ride into Jerusalem in fulfillment of the prophecy in the Hebrew Bible?

Would it have meant that there would have been no Palm Sunday parade?

Would it have meant that God's plan of redemption for the world had been thwarted or changed in some way?

Or course, we know the answer. Scripture gives us incident after incident of persons who refused to serve God, but that did not thwart the will of God. God simply chose another person to carry out God's will.

WHAT IF NO ONE HAD BEEN WILLING TO TRUST JESUS?

Or, to update the Scripture and the passage: ***“Would YOU be willing to loan Jesus your truck-----or your life?”***

WHAT IF NO ONE IS WILLING TO TRUST JESUS?

Would we have to close the doors of Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church?

Would we have to tell our basketball teams and *Kindermusik* and STAR and the NAMI groups that they would have to find another place to meet?

Would we have to tell the *Interfaith Hospitality Network* that they were going to have to go it alone?

Would we have to tell the Baker family in Ireland and the Morgan family in Bangladesh that they would either have to go it alone or come back home to the USA and go to work?

Would we tell Church World Service simply to let old people and little children starve where there is famine in the world?

WHAT IF NO ONE IS WILLING TO TRUST JESUS?

Let me bring Matthew Henry’s 18th century comment to our 21st century consideration concerning ***“Let not Christians scorn to be beholden one to another.....”***

The question could be raised this way:

What if no Christian is willing to trust another Christian?

Do you trust your fellow members of Oakland Avenue PCUSA?

Do you trust your elected Officers to do what is wise and faithful for Christ and the Church?

Do you trust your missionaries to tell you the truth about what is happening on our mission fields throughout the world?

Do you trust your church school teachers as they wrestle with the Bible study every week?

Do you trust your Session's Committee on Operations to be good stewards of the money you give to the church?

What if no Christian is willing to trust another Christian?

Let me give you a real, true-life, Presbyterian example of TRUST.

It happened in Anderson, SC, in the 1960s.

A Presbyterian couple, both in their *late eighties*, lived completely on social security and a very small railroad pension. While the husband was mobile, he was not able to function alone and the wife did everything for him....until she fell and broke her hip. While they had no known relatives in the world, they did have 37 cats!

Within one week's time-span, a fellow Presbyterian had the woman hospitalized in Anderson Memorial, went to a lawyer in the church and had himself given the power of attorney for the couple, sold the couples' house to remove "property" as the only barrier to having the husband admitted to the Anderson County Home for the Aged, invested the sale money from the house in a trust fund to pay for nursing care for the wife, had the wife later admitted to a nursing home, called the Anderson County Humane Society to care for the 37 cats, and then proceeded to set up a structure in the congregation to have fellow Christians visit the couple on a regular basis.

What if no Christian is willing to trust another Christian?

You and I can thank God that Jesus' story does not end with today's story.

You and I can thank God that the story does not end with the borrowing of a colt on Palm Sunday.

You and I can thank God that the story does not end with the execution of Jesus on Good Friday.

You and I can thank God that there is an Easter which reminds us that God has overcome death and the grave. And therefore you and I do not have to be afraid even in the darkest hours.

So, there is some irony in that on this very day when we are waving at Jesus coming into the city, we are also waving to Laura going out of the city.

And Laura does not have to be afraid and neither do we!

[Thirteen hundred] years ago, back in the eighth century, an Eastern Orthodox Monk tried to put into words the joyous meaning of Easter. And these words speak to Oakland Avenue PCUSA in 2009. Listen:

*Come, ye faithful,
raise the strain of triumphant gladness:
God has brought His people forth
into joy from sadness.
Now, rejoice, Jerusalem,
and with true affection
welcome in unwearied strains
Jesus' resurrection.*

That is hymn #115 in The Presbyterian Hymnal. And I invite you to make a profession of your faith by singing it.