

March 24, 2024

As You Are Going: Palm Sunday – “We Wish to See Jesus”

John 12:12-26

Vernon Advent Christian Church

You may have noticed that we have taken a pause from our look into the mission and growth of the early church in the book of Acts and have started a “mini-series,” if you will, around the events leading up to the cross and resurrection of Jesus, starting last week with the resurrection of Lazarus and ending next week with the empty tomb on Resurrection Sunday. And you might ask, “What does this have to do with our mission as believers and our theme?” Well, brothers and sisters, simply put, there is no mission without the empty tomb and the resurrection! This is the Gospel message, that Jesus paid the due penalty for sin by his atoning death, he conquered the effects of sin, namely death itself by his resurrection and offers the free gift of salvation to whosoever will come to faith. And the proclamation of that message, the Gospel, is the mission. That's why we, as believers, make such a big deal of, and celebrate, Resurrection Sunday! If Jesus is still in the tomb, then there is no message to proclaim. More on that next week.

So, where are we going today? Let me start by saying that I think most of us like a good parade. A parade is usually held to celebrate a person, a day or an event. Think of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. After all the floats and bands go by, who is there at the end, symbolically ushering in the Christmas season? Santa Claus. I've never been to New York to see the Macy's parade, although I've seen it a bunch of times on tv, but back in February of 2017, I had the opportunity to join a million other New Englanders and go to the parade in Boston to celebrate the Patriots Superbowl victory over the Atlanta Falcons. This one was extra special because at one point in the game the Patriots were down 28-3 but then they orchestrated the largest comeback in Superbowl history winning the game in overtime 34-28. Never having the opportunity to go to one of these parades before, I got there early enough to find a spot right in the front row at the guard rail in Copley Square and waited in the freezing rain and snow for several hours for the parade to pass by. Finally, off in the distance you could hear the police and fire trucks approaching. And as the duck boats were passing by with all the players and their families on board, I thought to myself, “I hope I get to see Brady,” because as the boats went by you could only see whoever happened to be on that side of the vehicle. Some were moving around making sure to wave to everybody and others weren't. And then it happened. The duck boat carrying Tom Brady passed by. And, as you can see by the photo evidence, I was able to get quick picture of the greatest QB to ever play the game holding the Superbowl trophy. Some might ask, why would anyone in their right mind do such a thing? Stand out in the freezing rain and snow for several hours just so see a man holding a trophy. Because it was my favorite team, led by my favorite player and they had just done something that no one thought was possible and I wanted to be a part of it and see it for myself. And evidently, about a million other people agreed.

Now, I doubt there was freezing rain and snow when Jesus entered into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. But as we'll see in a few moments a large crowd had gathered for a “parade,” of sorts, because Jesus was coming to Jerusalem and the people wanted to see him because he had done something that no one thought was possible. And what was that? Well, last week, Pastor Bruce led us through John ch. 11, and I hope you took up the challenge to read the whole

chapter for yourself. We learned that Jesus, very publicly, raised Lazarus from the dead after he had been in his tomb for four days. As you might imagine, this caused quite the stir as the town where this took place, Bethany, was only 2 miles away from Jerusalem where large crowds were starting to gather because the Passover was only a week away. In fact, John records right before the passage we're going to read today, in John 12:9-11, that when a large crowd from Jerusalem found out that Jesus was just over in Bethany they went to go and see him. And not only him, but they wanted to see Lazarus as well, because they wanted to see if what they had heard was real. Well, this enraged the religious leaders and not only were they looking to kill Jesus, but they were also seeking ways to kill Lazarus so that they could get rid of the evidence that this miracle had taken place. And picking up right here in the story, let's look at John's account of this event we refer to as Palm Sunday and Jesus' words to some of those in the crowd who had gathered for the Passover. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the Word of God.  
[Read John 12:12-26]

Our text breaks down into two parts today. We'll obviously look into both, but we will spend a little bit more time in the second section, vs. 20-26, as we seek to connect this event to our mission of making disciples. But before we get there, let's first look at vs. 12-19 and talk briefly about the triumphal entry of Jesus itself. And I think the point that John wants us to see here, as he describes this event, is that Jesus is the True King.

We see here that Jesus is embracing this identity now, not pushing it away as he often did earlier in his ministry. Not because he didn't know who he was or what he came to do. But it simply was not the time for the plan to be revealed in its fullness yet. Now, as he did in the case with raising Lazarus, Jesus is making a very public statement that he is not only just a king but the True King and promised Messiah.

Vs. 12-13 tell us that as Jesus approached Jerusalem, and began to enter into it, a large crowd began to gather palm branches to wave in celebration and to welcome him in. The palm branch was a symbol of victory, and more specifically, it was symbolic of the promised messianic deliverer of the OT prophecies. In the recent history of Israel, just before the time of Jesus, the palm branch was printed on Hebrew coins as a reminder of the successful Maccabean revolt against Antiochus IV and the Greek Empire before Rome came to power. The crowd is crying out that the King of Israel has come and they're hoping Jesus will do the same. They begin shouting, "Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord," quoting Psalm 118:25-26 and celebrating Jesus as the Messiah, their long-awaited king. "Hosanna" means "Save us!" And the people are recognizing Jesus as one who comes by the authority and power of the Lord. He is the prophesied king. This is the nightmare the Pharisees and chief priests feared.

John continues in vs. 14-16 by quoting Zechariah 9:9. [Read] Jesus fulfilled this prophecy about the coming King of Israel riding into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey, just as Zechariah prophesied. All four Gospel writers record the triumphal entry of Jesus and all include the fact that he rode in on a donkey fulfilling this well-known prophecy. But the part of the prophecy that John quotes that the others do not is: "Fear not, daughter of Zion." John wants us to know there is no need to fear any longer. The true king has come. The true king has come to save his people and that is exactly what he will do.

Now, notice how John clearly points out that the kingship of Jesus is more than a local, Jewish kingship, but in fact he is the one true king of the world. [Read John 12:19] Once again these religious leaders continue to speak more than they know as we saw last week in John 11:50-52.

This brings us to the second section of our text today, and its where we will spend the bulk of our time this morning. I will say its unclear as to whether the conversation in these verses took place during the triumphal entry itself or sometime during the passion week. Either way Jesus' message and John's point of recording it are the same. And the truth is this, to truly live, we must first die to self. And this truth develops over the course of these next few verses.

First Jesus reveals that the hour has come in vs. 20-23. Look at verse 20. [Read] These weren't Greek speaking Jews, these were ethnic Greeks or gentiles as they are commonly referred to in the NT. But we're told that they went up to Jerusalem to worship during the Passover feast. Which ties back to vs. 19 and the fear of the religious leaders, "that the whole world is going after him."

And we're told that they first approach Philip in vs. 21, who interestingly enough is the only disciple with a Greek name, which indicates that he had a Hellenistic background and was probably the reason these Greeks went to him. And we're told that they have a request. They say, "we wish to see Jesus." Just as an aside, and an important question we should repeatedly ask ourselves, "Am I living my life in such a way that would invite someone to ask if I can introduce them to Jesus?" Do people see enough of Jesus in your life that they would think to even ask that question?

So, Philip tells Andrew, another disciple, and they both bring the matter to Jesus. Look at what Jesus says in vs. 23, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Jesus recognizes this event, the bringing in of the Gentiles, as the signal that the time had come. Up to this point, Jesus has consistently told people that "his hour had not yet come" as I mentioned earlier. But here he says that, "his hour has come."

"The hour" which Jesus is referring to here is the time of his atoning death on the cross. Everything had led up to this point and its now here where Jesus would lay down his life for sinful humanity. His crucifixion will take place in the next few days. Which is why up to this point he has spoken of his hour as some point off in the distant future, but now, here in this passage, he talks about his hour in the present tense. This moment is finally upon him. "His hour has come." And notice he connects the hour of his death to being glorified. Aren't those things contradictory? Where else in our human experience do we associate death as being a good thing? Normally, we think of sadness, despair, grief, and heartache as being associated with death. But that's not the case with Jesus. Of course, in the moment there was great agony and grief on the part of Jesus and deep sorrow and loss felt by his followers. But that was Friday, as they say, and Sunday was coming.

Jesus receives all the glory, honor, and praise because of his sacrificial death. The cross of Jesus Christ sits at the very center of what we believe as Christians. All of God's divine attributes are wrapped up in the cross. God's love, justice, and faithfulness (just to name a few) all find their ultimate fulfillment in the cross. We come here, to this place, and join with others around the world who are doing the same in their local churches, to worship the living God for the sacrificial gift of our Lord Jesus. His hour was finally at hand. The time had come.

With his time drawing near, Jesus shares an illustration to make the point that salvation only comes through the cross. Look at verse 24 with me. [Read] Jesus uses this illustration to help them understand what he came to earth to do. The basic idea is straightforward: a seed that falls, or is planted, in the soil must ultimately die, or decompose, in order for it to produce its fruit. He's referring to the fact that his death is the atonement, or the payment, for the sins of his people. His death is what gives the Christian eternal life.

But notice what Jesus says at the end of vs. 24, “but if it (the seed) dies, it bears much fruit.” He’s not hopeful his death will produce fruit by saving the lost. He knows it will. Jesus not only opens the door to salvation, but he grabs our hand and walks us through it too. Any view of salvation that doesn’t teach that Jesus does it all and is involved in every aspect is deeply flawed and insufficient. This should be an encouragement to us because it takes all the guesswork out of it. You don’t have to wonder if what you’ve done is enough because what Jesus accomplished on the cross was sufficient. What Jesus did for you and for me was, and is, enough.

So, what does this mean for us? In our endeavor to follow Christ’s commands and be a church on mission, what do we do when our wants and desires come up against the opportunities to share the Gospel with those who wish to see Jesus? This is the final point this morning, the cost of following Jesus is our lives. To trust in Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death, that means you must die to yourself. Look at vs. 25. [Read]

Jesus is asking a simple question: What do we value most? If you love and value yourself, your possessions, friends, and family more than Jesus and what he has called you to do then you’re focus cannot be on the mission at hand. That’s what Jesus is referring to when he talks about loving your life. And really, what Jesus is saying is incredibly countercultural isn’t it? Because we’re constantly being encouraged to think about ourselves first to the detriment of all else. There are whole industries dedicated to self-help, self-love, and self-care. Individualism is one of the great guiding principles of our society. But that’s not what Jesus calls us to. He calls his followers to die to themselves. Jesus teaches us that our wants, our desires, our loves, should be secondary to others and he gives himself as the example. David Guzik, in his commentary on this passage, states, “We are called to *hate* our life not in the sense that we disregard it, but in the sense that we freely give it up for God.”

Jesus teaches us that we must deny ourselves. We must always be willing to humble ourselves in order to exalt Him. This is reiterated in verse 26: [Read] This is the paradox of the Christian life: the way up is down. Eternal life means you must humble yourself before the Lord and die to self. Again, it’s so countercultural, it flies in the face of everything we naturally think. Our culture believes that in order to be super successful you have to have a cutthroat spirit. You must be willing to do whatever it takes to get to the top, step on people, hurt people, in order to achieve success. But, Jesus is encouraging all of us to think of our own desires as secondary or in submission to him and what he calls us to, namely to share the Gospel and make disciples. After all, Christians are called to take up our cross daily and follow him. It’s having an attitude that serving Christ is, and will always be, far better than anything this world has to offer. That’s denying yourself. That’s what it means to die to yourself.

Our salvation is free, but following Christ costs everything. And it’s more than what we often put in. It’s not just showing up on Sunday mornings or fitting “our faith” in whenever it’s convenient. No, following Christ requires our whole life. Just as Jesus was obedient until death, you and I must die to ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow him. It’s not just about waving palm branches when things are going well. But it’s following him all the way to the cross no matter what. That is what it means to be a follower of Christ. That’s what it means to be a disciple. That’s what it means to be on mission.

In our passage today, the Lord Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem to the celebration of thousands of people who had been looking for Jesus. Among them were some Greeks who brought with them a request, “We wish to see Jesus.” We live in a world full of people that need to “see Jesus.” He laid down his life in full obedience to the Father in order to save the world from the wrath and judgment of God. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. Those

of us who have put our faith in Christ have been now invited to join him in this rescue mission. But we must have the same attitude as the Apostle Paul as he wrote in Gal. 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." We must put away our own selfish desires and humble ourselves for the sake of the Gospel. We're all busy and our priorities are often not where they should be, but if we're going to be a Church on mission, and reaching our community with the Gospel, we need to humble ourselves and be willing to live our lives in obedience to Christ. Let's pray.