

The crowds waited in anticipation for this man Jesus to come, they had heard great things. Some had even seen him perform miracles, some had listened to him speak and were enthralled, some in the crowd merely wanted a reason to celebrate, and some just followed the crowd. As they peered off through the gate leading towards the Mount of Olives they saw him coming in the distance riding on a donkey, just as the prophet had prophesied many years ago. This was the King they had all been longing for, this was the time of Israel's restoration to grandeur! As the excitement continued to build and build throughout the crowd, people began laying their cloaks on the road and others cut down palm branches waving them and laying them too on the ground. As Jesus entered into the city the crowd burst into song "Hosanna, to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest Heaven!"

The crowds in Jerusalem were in full fervor over Jesus' entry into the city, because they thought that maybe, just maybe Jesus was the Messiah that the prophets had spoken of for so long, maybe just maybe Jesus was the long awaited King that would restore Israel to glory in the world, the King that would free Israel from the yoke of Roman oppression. The crowd was full of expectation and fervor, the crowd was ready to crown Jesus as King right there and then... The crowds believed they knew what Jesus was about, they believed that he fulfilled what they had always wanted, they believed that he had come in earthly power and glory. The crowd was full of admiration for this man riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, just as the prophet Zechariah had prophesied and the people had waited so long for.

As people, I think that it is very easy to relate to this sort of story, it is very easy to see ourselves amidst the crowd shouting the praises of Jesus, shouting our dedication to this King, to the Son of God, to the one who restores all things. Like the people of Jerusalem who welcomed Jesus with shouts of Hosanna and palm branches, it is easy for us to shout praises to the coming King, it is easy for us to expectantly look for Jesus to right all the wrongs we see in the world, to meet the expectations we have for his coming reign and it is easy for us to long for his ascension to his throne on high... It is easy for us to admire him, just as the crowds did.

It is easy for us to fall into the same trap that the crowds on Palm Sunday fell into, when they believed that Jesus was the conquering King who was ready to fulfill all their expectations, ready to give them everything they wanted, rather than everything they needed. There is a temptation in the Christian life to believe that God gives us what we want, that if we just pray hard enough, or sing loud enough that God will bless us with the things we so desire, that he will give into our pleas and desires because we're faithful or we pray 'hard enough'. There is a temptation to see in Jesus, the fulfillment of our own desires our own visions of what God's kingdom might look like.

While it is easy for us to admire him and easy for us to shout our praises to him, the question that we are faced with today as we begin Holy Week, is whether or not we are ready to ride with him? Are we ready to ride with this king through his own journey through Holy Week? Are we ready to ride with him as he shows us what his kingdom and his kingship is all about? Are

we ready to follow this King who we acclaim, who we admire from afar? Are we ready to follow him as he kneels down in service before his disciples on Maundy Thursday? Are we ready to follow him and experience his betrayal and abandonment by his closest friends in the Garden of Gethsemane? Are we ready to follow him into the kangaroo courts of Pilate and the Chief priests? Are we ultimately ready to follow him as he ascends to his throne, the torturous tree, the Cross?

Following Jesus as Lord and King is not as easy as shouting praises and worshipping him on Sunday, as Christians we cannot follow Jesus and stay in Palm Sunday. Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem as King, but not as a King with power and armies, not as King that seeks to overthrow and oppress, but rather as a King who serves, a King who takes the full weight of oppression, of sin and of death upon himself so that we can be free to experience life in God, so that we can be free to live eternal life in the God's Kingdom now and forever more.

Will you ride with your King? Will you kneel before one another, before strangers and serve them, washing their feet? Will you break bread with one another, sharing your fellowship even with those who have injured, offended or annoyed you? Will you ascend to Jesus' cruciform throne and throw yourself on the love and mercy of God?

As we begin our journey through Holy Week today with songs of praise and worship, let us remember that we laud and magnify the Servant King, we sing our Hosannas not to a King who overthrows with power and might, but who sets us free with love and mercy, who gives his life for us, so that we might have life abundant. As we enter Holy Week, I challenge each of us not only to admire Jesus, not only to shout our praises from afar, but to commit to ride with him, to follow him through the darkness and death of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, so that we might experience the joy of new life in his Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.