

Topic	Palm Sunday
Reference	Matthew 21:1-9 & Luke 19:37-44
Date	28 March 2021
Speaker	David and Suzanne Adams

Good morning church and a blessed Palm Sunday to all of you. We're glad that each one of you is able to join with us for this Palm Sunday worship service. Before we begin the sermon, I'd like to mention that at the end of the sermon, there'll be an opportunity for prayer. If you would like for someone to pray with you, just type in the word, pray in the chat and someone at the church will be ready to talk with you. Also, I want to encourage everybody they can to remain not only to the benediction, but past the addition, because there'll be an opportunity for fellowship. During this period of MCO and CMCO, we've not been able to see each other like we would enjoy doing and so there is an opportunity for some fellowship. So I'd encourage you to stick to the end and then join in one of the chat groups if you have time.

Well, today is Palm Sunday, a day of celebration and praise. A time of joyful acclamation that Jesus is King, but Palm Sunday is also a day of sadness, of weeping, even wailing. That first Palm Sunday almost 2000 years ago was a day of huge importance and significance. So for centuries Christians all over the world have observed this special day. We have records of the early Christians celebrating Palm Sunday, where back in the fourth century a Spanish believer, a lady named Egeria made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and she was kind of like an eyewitness reporter. This is what she wrote about the Palm Sunday celebration.

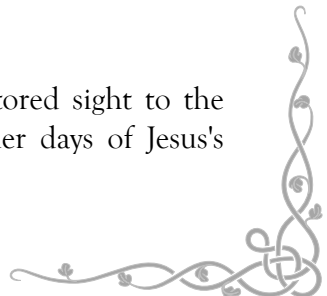
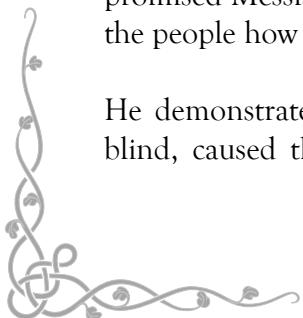
The Christians gathered early in the morning at the Mount of Olives. They sang hymns. They prayed and they read from the scripture. The carried branches and palms and they shouted “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” The small children were lifted up on the shoulders of the adults as they wave their branches.

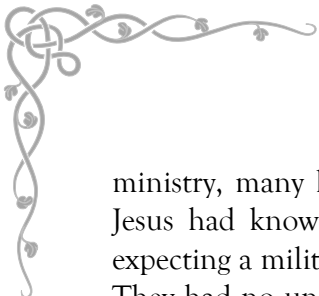
And she wrote,

People of high rank and the very poor spent the entire day walking from the top of the mountain down to Jerusalem, just as Jesus and his followers had done.

So ever since the very early days Christians have celebrated and they continue to commemorate Palm Sunday as a Holy day. Today, this very day, we joined with millions of Christians all over the world to remember and celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem as Messiah and King. And we also want to reflect on Jesus' entry into our hearts. When Jesus enters our lives as our King, he will make a distinct difference in our thoughts, in our attitudes and in the way we live. Throughout his three-year public ministry, prior to that first Palm Sunday, Jesus had been gradually revealing his true identity that a promised Messiah coming King, reigning Lord. He had proclaimed the kingdom of heaven and he taught the people how to have a right relationship with God and how to treat others.

He demonstrated his authority over nature, he cast out demons, cleansed lepers, restored sight to the blind, caused the lame to walk and even raise the dead to life. So even in the earlier days of Jesus's





ministry, many had thought he might be the Messiah. So, they had wanted to proclaim him King, but Jesus had known the people were misguided. They had false expectations of the Messiah. They were expecting a militaristic conquering King who would overthrow and drive out the hated Roman oppressors. They had no understanding of a Messiah as the suffering servant, whose mission was to bring forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God through his suffering death and resurrection.

The people wanted a political deliverer, one who had restore peace, prosperity and power to their nation of Israel. They had no concept of a savior who was coming to save all peoples who believe from every race, tribe and tongue from all over the world. So, Jesus had up to this point flatly rejected any prior attempts by the crowds to acclaim him Messiah or King. Even Jesus' closest followers had false expectations of the Messiah. He had told his 12 disciples on at least three occasions that he would suffer and die in Jerusalem, but they still did not understand. So Jesus had urged secrecy when he revealed his true identity to his disciples. For example, once when alone with the 12, Jesus asked them, who do people say that I am, then he asked, who do you say that I am?

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God", and Jesus affirmed Peter that he was right. He said, "My father in heaven has revealed this to you." But then Jesus strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Messiah, but now 2000 years ago on that first Palm Sunday, the time had come for the truth of who Jesus truly was to be revealed. The secrecy was being lifted. Jesus planned to ride into the Royal city of Jerusalem, the ancient capital of the Jewish state. This was the seat of political authority where the throne of King David had been and Jerusalem was also where the temple was, the holy center of Jewish, religious life.

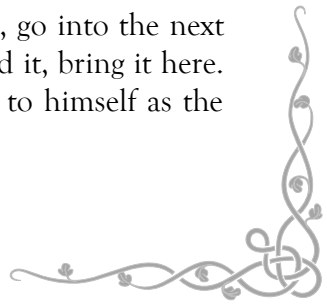
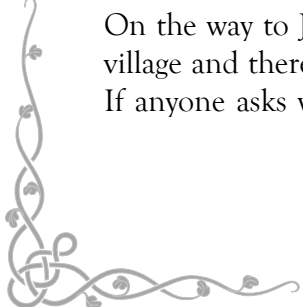
Through his actions Jesus would publicly demonstrate to those who knew the scriptures that he was indeed the Messiah. He knew the crowds of people would acclaim him as King, but he also knew this would cost him his life. Jesus purposefully chose the days preceding Passover to be the time when he would make his identity clear and public.

The Passover was celebrated every year to remind the Jewish people of how God had freed their forefathers from slavery in Egypt and how God had saved their lives. Their lives had been spared by having the blood of a sacrificial lamb on their doors. Jesus chose that particular time because he knew his public claim to being a Messiah would result in his death, but that's why he came to earth to be the sacrificial lamb whose shed blood would bring forgiveness and freedom from slavery to sin to all who would believe.

Jesus began his Royal entry into Jerusalem by passing over the Mount of Olives. This mountain played a significant role in Old Testament prophecy. As the place where the Lord would come in victory, the Messiah was expected to appear on the Mount of olives. The prophet Zechariah chapter 14 verse four had foretold,

On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the East.

On the way to Jerusalem going over the Mount of olives, Jesus told two of his disciples, go into the next village and there you will find a young donkey that has never been ridden before. Untied it, bring it here. If anyone asks why you're doing that, just say the Lord needs it. Jesus is now referring to himself as the



Lord. He is attesting to his rightful authority. The disciples obeyed without question and the owner of the Colt willingly let Jesus borrow his young donkey to ride on.

Doesn't it seem strange that Jesus chose to ride on the colt of a donkey when he made his kingly triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. Victorious Kings would have been expected to enter their capital city mounted on a stallion, a war horse or riding in a fine chariot. Yeah, I'm sure there were some bystanders that saw thought Jesus should really consult with a public relations expert. He needs to talk to an image consultant. What kind of king would purposefully choose to ride on a lowly donkey in his triumphal entry, only a King who was on a mission of goodwill. One whose purpose was to bring peace and reconciliation.

Jesus presented himself as the Prince of Peace as the prophet Isaiah had foretold and Jesus was showing that he was the promised Messiah, the King who had been foretold by the prophet Zechariah. Listen to the words of the prophecy found in Zechariah nine verse nine,

Rejoice greatly O daughter of Jerusalem, shout aloud O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold your King is coming to you, righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

So the people in the crowd that were familiar with their scriptures, who knew what Zachariah had prophesied could realize that Jesus truly was the promised one. For over 500 years, the Jewish people had been expecting the Lord to appear on the Mount of Olives and they had been longing for the righteous salvation bringing King to come to Jerusalem, mounted on the colt of a donkey.

I've read the gospel accounts of the triumphal entry many-many times, but I would never given much thought to the fact that Jesus choose to ride on a colt that had never been ridden before, but that's quite remarkable of itself. Yes, it is. I grew up on a farm. We had a few horses, and I can remember when I was young, going with my dad as his was going to try to break a colt. Now break just means you train the animal to be willing to accept some weight or accept a rider on its back. That started off just by putting a small blanket that usually goes under a saddle on the back of that colt and the colt did not like it at all. He went crazy. After the colt finally got used to that, Dad added a little bit more weight, but each time the colt would buck and kick. He didn't like it. And then finally my dad mounted up to ride and the colt led its displeasure be made known, and I can still see in my mind's eye that colt's violent reaction and my dad desperately try and to stay on.

So yes, it is quite remarkable that Jesus was able to ride on a colt that had never been ridden on before. And he rode it through the midst of large crowds of loudly cheering people, people who are waving palm branches and laying them on the road for the donkey to walk over. An unbroken animal remained calm under the hands of the Messiah who also controls nature. Huge crowds had gathered, some had already been accompanying Jesus for several days on his journey, but there were also those who came out from Jerusalem to greet Jesus. They had heard that he was coming. Jesus, the renowned prophet from Galilee. Why he's the one who had just a few days earlier in a village nearby restored life to Lazarus, a man who had been dead for four days, messianic fervor was running high.

There was a Jewish tradition that when a male baby was born to Jewish parents the father would hold the newborn up in his arms and he would ask God a question. You would ask God, is this the one. I'm sure on that day, there were some in the crowd asking God, is Jesus the one. So many in the crowd, took off their cloaks and spread them on the road in front of Jesus for him to ride over. That's evidently the way they gave a red carpet greeting reception to an important dignitary back then, but even more it was a way that people could acknowledge Jesus kingship. In the Old Testament scriptures we see a precedent that many in the crowd were probably familiar with, the story of Jahu. In 2-Kings chapter nine verse 12, the prophet's word concerning Jahu who was proclaimed.

Thus says the Lord, I anoint you King over Israel.

And the following verse says,

Then in haste, every one of them took off his cloak and put it under Jahu on the bear steps and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed Jahu is King.

So spreading cloaks on the road to be under Jesus, as he rode along was more than just a sign of great respect. It was an acknowledgement or at least a fervent desire that Jesus was King and it is important to note Jesus accepted this acclamation. Earlier when crowds had tried to declare him King, he had rejected their attempts, but this time he welcomes the crowd's recognition of him as the long-awaited King.

The people also spread Palm branches on the road. Now our sermon text morning just mentioned branches, but John's gospel tells us they were Palm branches. What's so significant about Palm branches? Well, they had come to be associated with political ideas and they were a symbol of the Jewish state. As a matter of fact, the image of a Palm branch was on coins minted by the Jews there in their struggles against the Romans. The history of Palm branches being identified with Jewish political leaders goes back to the second century BC, the time of the Maccabees. Jewish leaders who liberated their country from occupying forces. According to records we have from that time, when Simon Maccabi free Jerusalem, the Jewish people celebrated his victory with praise and with Palm branches, with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel.

So the actions of the crowds strewing Palm branches in front of Jesus probably showed deep nationalistic fervor. They were hailing Jesus as the Promised One, the one they hoped to be the mighty deliverer, who would save them from the hated Romans, gentiles, whose very presence defiled the Holy city and their entire land.

Can you imagine being one of the persons that had gathered that day to see Jesus, what would you have thought? How would you have felt, try to picture the ecstatic crowds that had gathered, feel the excitement and the anticipation. Imagine honoring Jesus as King by spreading your cloak on the road in front of him, envision yourself holding a palm branch and joining in the shouts of Hosanna as Jesus rides triumphantly towards Jerusalem.

Some of those in the crowd might have thought finally after 60 years of being dominated by Rome will be free, no longer will we have to pay the exorbitantly high Roman taxes. We won't have to fear being put in

prison for no reason at all, nor will we be forced into slavery. Jesus is going to meet our greatest need, will be liberated from our enemies and the Jewish kingdom will be restored. Yes, some may have thought if anyone can meet our hopes and expectations, it will be Jesus. This man is a great prophet. He has tremendous power and he can perform mighty miracles. This is the moment, this is the time, change is coming and it will be glorious. The atmosphere that day was one of euphoria. The exuberant crowds were cheering and praising Jesus and they were using the words of a messianic Psalm, Psalm 118.

Verse 25 of Psalm 118 begins with the plea to the Lord God save us now, and that's what the crowd was crying to Jesus. Save us now. I didn't see that phrase in the scripture reading this morning. No you didn't. But it was there. It's there as a transliteration of the original Hebrew text of the song. The Hebrew for save us now is yahshana, Hosanna comes from yahshana. Now by Jesus' days, the meaning of the words, yahshana or Hosanna had evolved to also be an invocation of blessing and a shout of joyous praise.

So the crowd was crying out in praise of Jesus and at the same time making a plea for blessing, save us now. They cried out Hosanna to the son of David. Son of David was a messianic title. 1000 years earlier God had promised King David in 2-Samuel 7 that someone would come, who would reign on his throne forever. And the prophet Isaiah in chapter 9 verse 7 had said one would come who would reign on the throne of David forever, and even though the crowd would not have been aware of this, the angel Gabriel when announcing to Mary that she would be the mother of the Messiah told her the Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David.

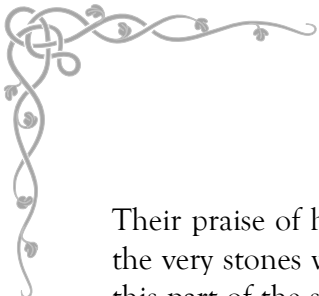
So when the crowd praise Jesus as being the son of David, it shows they were acclaiming him to be the promised King who would reign on David's throne as the anointed one. The praise of the crowd continued,

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”

That's also a direct quote from Psalm 118 verse 26. Many in the crowd must have believed. Jesus was the fulfillment of this Psalm about the promised Messiah, because their praise rang out blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Their worship continued, peace in heaven and glory in the highest. These words remind us of the angels message announcing Jesus' birth, “glory to God in the highest and on earth peace with whom he is well pleased”.

The crowd could not yet have understood how Jesus would bring peace in heaven or peace with God, but a few days later, Jesus, the lamb of God would give his life as a sacrifice. He would do this so that people who were separated from God by sin and shame could be reconciled to him and have peace with him. So as Jesus approached Jerusalem, the voices of the multitudes were raised in praise. They hailed Jesus as Messiah and King, and it is important to note Jesus accepted their acclaim because he was the promised one, coming to bring deliverance. He accepted their praise because he is the King, the Lord over all.

But the Pharisees didn't seem to like that very much. No, they didn't. They basically told Jesus, tell your disciples to shut up. Well, that's not exactly how the Bible phrases it, but that is what was meant. Jesus, let the Pharisees know that there was nothing that could stop the praise. He was pleased with the people's response because they had recognized his true identity.





Their praise of him was totally appropriate. Jesus told the Pharisees. I tell you if these people were silent, the very stones would cry out. The praise of Jesus will have no end. Something that stands out to me in this part of the story is the contrast between the joyful recognition of Jesus by the crowd and the rejection of him by the Pharisees, they all had the same scriptures. They all knew of Jesus's wonderful miracles, and they had heard his amazing teaching. And now they were seeing prophecies fulfill before their very eyes and yet they refuse to accept the truth about Jesus. Their opposition to him grew even more vicious. What a difference to the cheerful acceptance of Jesus by the multitudes.

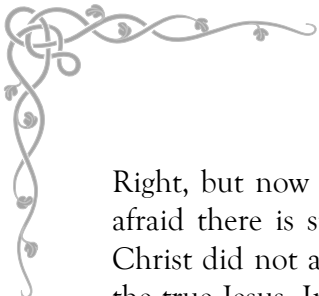
Yes that is definitely a very sharp contrast, but it seems like that's the way it has always been and probably always will be. You see when presented with the truth some people accept but others reject. John's gospel points this out very clearly in chapter 1 verses 11 to 12. It says Jesus came to his own but his own people did not receive him, but to all who did receive him those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God and we will see this contrast again five days after Palm Sunday Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One rejected him, the other believed on him and it is still true in our world today.

Some people choose to accept Jesus by faith as their Lord and savior. Others decide to reject his rightful claims on their lives or to at least ignore him. One thing, I've always wondered about when I heard the story of the triumphal entry and the crucifixion is how could the crowds of people respond in such vastly different ways. On Sunday, the crowds blessed Jesus, on Friday they cursed him. One day, they sing his praises then five days later they call for his death. What a contradiction? Could some of the same people have been in both crowds, and if so what would have turned their cheers into jeers?

I don't understand that either and we don't know for sure if some of the same people called for his exaltation one day and for his execution a few days later, but crowds can be fickle. People can and do change their mind. If our expectations are not met and we don't get what we want, we can easily turn on the one we think has let us down. Even though Jesus had accepted the acclaim of the multitudes on Palm Sunday, he knew that they did not really understand his mission. They had wrong ideas. They had false expectations of the Messiah. They cried Hosanna, save us now and Jesus was going to do that. But not in the way they expected, they meant, save us from the bondage of the Romans, but Jesus' mission was to save them from themselves, to save them from their bondage to sin.

The crowds wanted Jesus to be the King who would rule over their country, but Jesus came to rule over the hearts and lives of men and women of those who have been transformed by receiving his grace. And by bowing before him as King. The crowds wanted a nationalistic ruler who would make Israel great again. But Jesus came for the whole world. The people of God were to expand way beyond the Jewish race to extend to all people everywhere, to all who would respond to Jesus in repentance and faith. It is obvious that many of the people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem may have not been worshiping Jesus as he truly is. Instead, they may have been idolizing their own hopes and desires. They may have been praising their own ideas and opinions of who they thought the Messiah should be. I'm sure that's true but we can't be too hard on the people of Palm Sunday. After all, they could not have fully yet understood Jesus and his mission before his crucifixion and his resurrection.





Right, but now we have the gospel. We have the entire New Testament, and they didn't have that. I'm afraid there is still a similar problem today though. Many people in our time who claim the name of Christ did not appear to have a clear understanding of who Jesus really is. Some may not be worshiping the true Jesus. Instead, they might be bowing down before an image they themselves have created of who they want Jesus to be or they might be serving an imaginary Jesus that someone else has created for them. An imaginary Jesus who will always do their bidding, who is there to serve them, whose primary concern is for their personal comfort, happiness and wellbeing. And as long as Jesus does everything they want him to do, they're happy to worship him.

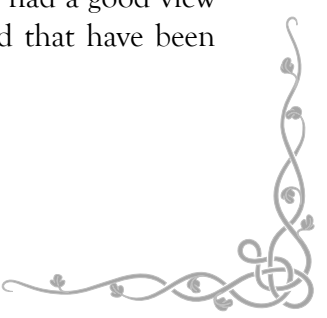
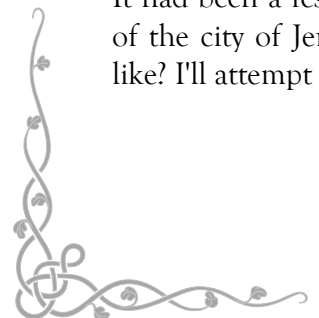
Yes. Some might ask, will Jesus be my key to success? Will he allow me to be prosperous? Can he make all my dreams come true? They want to treat him as a good luck charm of sorts, or some might want Jesus to rain down destruction on those who have hurt them or done them wrong. They want Jesus to settle the score so to speak with their enemies. Of course, Jesus will not meet the false expectations placed upon him, but the danger is we could end up taking the position. If Jesus does not meet my expectations of what I think my King should do, then I won't let him rule over my life anymore.

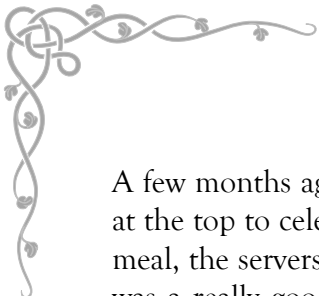
And if that does happen, it probably shows that such a person has never known who Jesus really is. It's important for us today to make sure we are worshiping the true Jesus. The one whose life, ministry and teaching have been revealed to us through the pages of Holy scripture. We want to make sure we identify with his purpose and his values then accept them for our own lives. For example, Jesus said I came not to be served but to serve and he demonstrated that by washing his disciple's feet. He also said I have come to seek and to save the lost, and he was willing to give his life for that purpose.

Some of us today might think that we know Jesus. We think we know who he is. We think we know what the gospel is, but we may not have really understood the message. We need to prayerfully search the scripture, asking God to reveal the truth to us, and then accept Jesus as he truly is, not as the one we might wish him to be. Well, so far in our Palm Sunday text we have seen how Jesus through his actions revealed his true identity. We've seen that the crowd have claimed him to be the Messiah, the anointed King, and we've seen that Jesus accepted their praise and adoration. So up to this point in the story, the atmosphere has been one of exuberance filled with excitement and joy.

The crowds have been cheering and singing praise. It's indeed been a triumphant processional go into the capital city. You could consider Jesus' mission for the day to be a great success. One might think Jesus would just enjoy the accolades and ride on into town, head held high and waving and smiling at the cheering crowds. But that's not what happened. As we said at the beginning, Palm Sunday is not only a day of celebration and praise, it is also a time of sorrow, of weeping, even wailing. Our sermon text says, when Jesus drew near and saw the city of Jerusalem he wept over it. It was much more than just a few tears rolling down his cheeks. It was more than subdued crying like we sometimes hear at funerals, but it was audible wailing.

It had been a festive occasion, spirits were high, but from the Mount of Olives where he had a good view of the city of Jerusalem, Jesus begins to wail. Try to imagine that scenario. What would that have been like? I'll attempt to illustrate by using an example from life today.





A few months ago, Suzanne and I went to the top of the KL tower, had lunch in the revolving restaurant at the top to celebrate her birthday. Good food, great company, a wonderful view of the city and after the meal, the servers brought out a birthday cake and sang, or at least I tried to sing happy birthday to you. It was a really good birthday celebration, but imagine what would it have been like in the middle of that celebration if when the servers brought the cake, we had looked out over the city of KL and began to sob loudly. Well, that's kind of like, it might've been back on that first Palm Sunday. It was a joyful occasion, yet it turned into a time of weeping and lament. Why did Jesus weep?

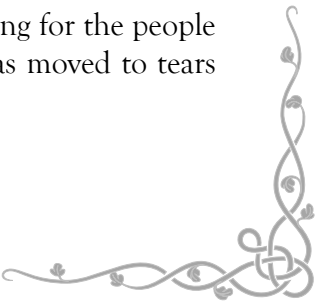
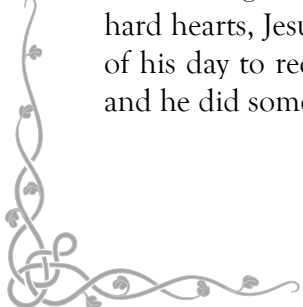
Well, he knew that in five days he would die an agonizing death by crucifixion. He would offer himself up as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He knew he was going to experience excruciating pain, but even worse than that he knew that for the first time ever he would experience the horror of being separated from God the father. But that is not why he wept. No, he wept over the city of Jerusalem. When looking out over the city, he did not see the impressive architecture or the gold plates that adorn the temple reflecting the rays of the sun. No. When looking at what was presumed by the crowd to be the capital city of his coming kingdom, all he could see in his mind was a smoldering desolate ruin because he knew that within a generation judgment would fall on this rebellious city and it would be destroyed.

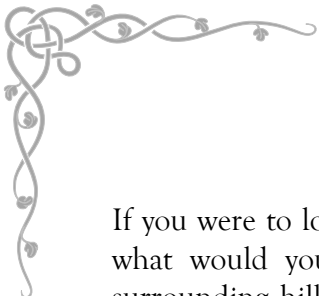
Jesus was weeping for the inhabitants of the city. His heart ached over the spiritual condition of the people who live there. Proud people were not aware of their great need for God. People who thought they truly knew who God was and what he wanted but they really did not, those who had an outward form of godliness but whose hearts were far from God. Jesus saw people who had a chance to receive him, but who instead would reject him, turning their backs on God who has sent Jesus to earth.

In a parallel passage in Matthew's gospel chapter 23 verse 37, we hear Jesus says he wept over the city saying, "Oh, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing."

The opportunity had come, but they missed their chance. Jesus said, would that you even you had known on this day, the things that make for peace. He offered them peace, peace with God. He offered them deliverance, but they did not or would not understand this. And our scripture text ends with Jesus lamenting over Jerusalem, saying judgment is coming because you did not recognize the time of your visitation. People in the crowd around Jesus would have probably recognized this phrase. The idea of the Lord visiting his people is found frequently in the Old Testament. Now, the idea is not that just that God just shows up to say, hi guys, how are things going? But God will visit as an act of deliverance. For example, in the book of Exodus God visits his people in Egypt in order to lead them out of slavery into freedom and into the promised land.

This time, the visitation of God was Jesus's coming to Jerusalem where he would die for our sins on the cross and where he would be raised back to life. Jesus was coming to bring redemption, but the people didn't recognize this visitation. In rejecting Jesus disaster awaits them. Realizing their blindness in their hard hearts, Jesus weeps over the city. Jesus' heart was broken when he saw the city. He long for the people of his day to recognize him for who he truly was and to respond in faith to him. He was moved to tears and he did something about it. He gave his life so that people could be saved.





If you were to look out over the Kuala Lumpur metropolitan area, maybe from the top of the KL tower, what would you see? Would you see the buildings, the business opportunities, the beauty of the surrounding hills and the clouds or would you also see the people of the city? And if so, would you see them through the eyes of Jesus. Millions who do not really know who Jesus is, who haven't received him as savior and King, people who face the judgment of being separated from God throughout eternity? When we look out over Subang Jaya, Petaling Jaya, Shah Alam, Klang, do our hearts break for those who don't know Jesus. Do we weep over family, friends and work colleagues who have not acknowledged Jesus as their rightful king.

Palm Sunday, a day to lift our voices and saying Hosanna as we worship Jesus, our savior and Lord, but also a day to reflect, have I accepted Jesus as he truly is? And do I allow the real Jesus to reign over all aspects of my life as King.

Palm Sunday, a day of celebration, but also a day to see the lostness all around us and be moved with compassion and action. Today, you might sense God speaking to you and you would like to respond to his offer of grace. You can pray right now where you are in your home and ask Jesus to reveal himself more clearly to you. You can ask him to forgive your sin and to take control of your life, or if you would like someone to pray with you just type the word pray right now in the chat. Someone from the church is ready and willing to pray with you now.

let's all join our hearts together now in prayer as Suzanne leads us.

Let us pray, "Our savior and King. Today we join with the worshipers on that first Palm Sunday, offering our own shouts of praise and celebration at your coming. Although we welcome you as the multitudes did almost 2000 years ago, we also have not always understood what that meant. And so Lord, as on that day, when you entered the rebellious city that later rejected you, we confess that our wills are as rebellious as Jerusalem's, that our faith is often more show in substance that our hearts are indeed in need of cleansing, have mercy on us son of David savior of our lives. Help us lay at your feet all that we have and all that we are. We trust you to forgive what is sinful and to heal what is broken. We ask you to give us your heart of compassion for all those around us who don't yet acknowledge you as King. We offer you our praises as we give our lives to you. May you always see our Palm branches waving high as we honor you, may you always hear our voices exalting you above everything else in our lives. Blessed is the King who came in the name of the Lord, who comes to us today through his spirit and who will come again? Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest heaven. Amen.