

Mark 11:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, on the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and told them, “Go into the village ahead of you. As soon as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it, and he will send it back here without delay.’”

⁴They left and found a colt on the street, tied at a door; and they untied it. ⁵Some who were standing there asked them, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” ⁶The disciples answered them just as Jesus had instructed them, and the men let them go.

⁷They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their garments on it, and Jesus sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their garments on the road. Others spread branches that they had cut from the fields. ⁹Those who went in front and those who followed were crying out,

Hosanna!

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

¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!

Hosanna in the highest!

¹¹Jesus went into the temple courts in Jerusalem and looked around at everything. Since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Hands of Praise

I.

The trouble for a lot of people, and they’re quite convinced they’re right, is that they are going to be bored when they get there.

There’s shock on the faces of children when you tell them there won’t be any ice cream cones there or playgrounds or stuffed animals. Older children are none too pleased when they hear that there won’t be any Xbox or Nintendo systems, nor will have any service whatsoever for their phones. Come to think of it, grown ups aren’t very happy with that last one, either. Pick your favorite activity—skiing, fishing, hunting, camping, going to a ball game, playing a round of golf—all missing.

People hear from their preachers and read in their Bibles that heaven is a place where we praise God, and worship and sing, and stand before our Creator and thank him for the great things he has done for us and the love he has shown us. Worship? Praise? Singing? Endlessly? That doesn’t sound very exciting.

The same thoughts keep people from praising God on earth. It doesn’t require much of an excuse for a weak soul to stay away from God’s house. All a sinner needs to hear is that there are some bland religious people at church, and he will condemn them all as hypocrites without even meeting any of them.

Today is Palm Sunday. It is one of the greatest days of worship and praise the whole year. This is a day on which we learn how to praise God and why we praise God.

Jesus’ triumphant ride into Jerusalem is the backdrop for praise. His humble and royal entry on a donkey draws all attention to him as King. Palm branches and cloaks spread in front of his passing donkey invite our offerings. The singing of the children and crowds of people encourage us to sing, as well.

II.

What’s your idea of praising God? Maybe many Lutherans, as well as people from other mainline denominations, think praising God is something that happens in a thing called a pew with some music from an organ or a piano, or perhaps a few other instruments.

All the Palm Sunday praise of Jesus took place *outside* God's house. Some of the greatest praise of Jesus took place even before the triumphant march and the singing and the spreading of palm branches.

The first praise came from the obedient hands of the disciples. Jesus gave them some instruction: "Go into the village ahead of you. As soon as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it, and he will send it back here without delay'" (Mark 11:2-3, EHV). Here's your mission, gentlemen: go, get a donkey. Don't ask, just take it. If anyone says anything, just tell them Jesus needs it.

Without any questions, the disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them. The obedience of the disciples shows enthusiastic praise of Jesus.

As they were carrying out their instructions: "Some who were standing there asked them, 'What are you doing, untying that colt?' ⁶The disciples answered them just as Jesus had instructed them, and the men let them go." (Mark 11:5-6, EHV). The people to whom the animal belonged also showed their hands of praise by giving the colt to Jesus without any further questions.

The kind of unquestioning obedience to God displayed by both the disciples and the owners of the donkey is just the kind of praise the Lord needs more of today. Praise of Jesus means more than saying: "Your will be done on earth," as we pray the Lord's Prayer here in church or at home during our devotions. It means voluntarily doing Jesus' will on this earth without questioning the Lord's wisdom or his love.

Look again at Jesus' instructions. They were unusual and vague. The disciples *must* have had questions. "Jesus, how do you know the donkey will be there? How do you know the owner will let us take it? How can you be so sure that we can take it without asking?" None of those questions were asked. The disciples praised Jesus with their obedience.

Our world does not give Jesus that kind of praise. They instead have all kinds of questions. Do God and his Word and his church have a right to tell us what to do at all? How can God send trouble into our lives and still claim to love us? The Bible simply does not fit well with the times when it names the man the head of the household and the woman the helper of man. Beyond that, why can't they live together without marriage? Why can't they curse and swear when everyone else does? Why should they go to church if they feel fine without it?

Believers praise God with obedience. Christians praise Jesus as King by the godly obedience of their daily lives. They obey without questioning Jesus' authority or wisdom. They live good, decent, and honest lives outside the church in the world every day. They don't just *pray* "Your will be done," they go out and obey so that Jesus' will is done on earth. This is praise. This is worship of Jesus that pleases God.

III.

One of the most sensitive areas of praise has always been the way we praise God with our money. We are sensitive about this subject. Money is valuable to us, and we are protective of it. It buys the things we need—and the things we *want*. Money represents our food and our home and transportation and our enjoyment and our influence. Another reason we are so sensitive about the mention of money in the church is that we are sinful people. No matter how long we have been Christians, by nature we are stingy and selfish. We arrogantly think our money is *ours*; we forget it is on loan from God. We do not think about God's promises or trust God's promises that if we are generous with his church, he will take care of us and bless us.

The Palm Sunday crowds were not tight with their praise of Christ. They were lavish

with their gifts of money and material things. One person happily gave the use of his donkey. The disciples took off their own cloaks and put them on the donkey for Jesus to sit on. Others took *their* cloaks and put them in the dirt, so the donkey Jesus rode wouldn't get its hooves dirty. Still others, having nothing else to give, cut down palm branches as a symbol of Jesus' victory. The crowds and the disciples all praised Jesus with their money.

It's Palm Sunday, 2021. There are still people going to their graves without hearing the gospel. There is still a need to praise Jesus with our money. Money is not just the resource that makes sure you have a home and some food on the table, it is also the vehicle God uses in his church today to spread the gospel. Sometimes it's easy to worry about whether you will have enough money to maintain a certain standard of living or go on vacation or buy something you just can't seem to live without. Is Jesus important enough that we bring our praise of money to him?

Perhaps the past year gives a bit of an answer, at least here at Holy Trinity. A year ago no one knew how offerings would be affected by a pandemic. God knew, of course. Offerings have *increased* at Holy Trinity during a challenging year for everyone. You have used your hands to praise Jesus with your money. Thanks be to God!

IV.

Other kind of praise that first Palm Sunday was the praise of mouths. "Those who went in front and those who followed were crying out, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:9-10, EHV).

When the praise of obedience and the praise of money is there, the praise of the mouth will naturally follow. It is enthusiastic. It is loud. It is joyous and happy.

The original Palm Sunday crowd had no printed liturgy or hymnal or screen to direct their worship. They hadn't rehearsed ahead of time. They didn't object that the praise was dull and boring. They didn't refuse to give their praise if there were no amplifiers and someone to lead them in worship. The enemies of Jesus were watching jealously as these people praised Jesus with their mouths when they weren't even in church.

Jesus still needs the praise of our mouths, but not just when we sing in church. He needs the spontaneous, sincere praise of our mouths out in the world where his enemies are listening. We will not convert any souls to Jesus by bad-mouthing Jesus' church or its members, or by being pessimistic and grumpy. We *will* give praise to the King by confessing our faith to the weak and sinful; by praying openly for those in need; by singing hymns, even *outside* of church; by speaking for the spiritual work of the church at voters' meetings and council meetings; by volunteering to work on various boards and committees that seek to continue doing the work of the church in this place.

Is heaven going to be boring? Perhaps you will think so if you think praising God on *earth* is boring. Perhaps if you are thinking that way now it is because you are doing nothing. There were only two groups of people watching Jesus enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: there were those who praised him and those who hated him.

God grant that *we* are in the group praising Jesus. Give us hands to praise him with unquestioning obedience; hands that praise him with our money, knowing that all the money in the world would not be able to repay the blood our Lord Jesus shed for us. Give us mouths to sing God's praise in church, and to speak his praises every day *outside* church, as well.

One day soon we will praise our Lord Jesus in heaven, and our praise will be anything *but* boring. Amen.