



April 1, 2007

## Selection Day

As I prepared the sermon for today, I took a little time to look back at where we've been since Christmas the rode we've traveled to get where we are today, Palm Sunday. It's been quite a journey through the Epiphany season we focused on making Christ manifest. We had a series of sermons that showed that Jesus claimed to me the Messiah his enemies too claimed that Jesus said He was the Messiah. We saw that creation said He was the Messiah at it yielded to Him in the miracles He did. We saw that the people around Him claimed He was the Messiah and probably most importantly we saw that God the Father himself said that Jesus was the Messiah at His Baptism and again on the Mount of Transfiguration.

With Lent we focused on two things. On Sunday we refocused on Christ's call to be perfect as God is perfect. We saw that this is done through Christian living as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount and on our Wednesday night services we focused on Christ's fulfillment of the various Jewish feasts and all the Old Testament prophecies. As I said it's been quite a journey but like any trip you follow a path or roads to get you some place and our trip was designed to get us here today, Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week and the most important seven days in Christian history. This week defines our faith and so I invite you on another journey a journey that begins today continues Thursday night with our celebration of the Passover and communion, Friday night our Good Friday night service, which is easily the most moving and symbolic of the services here at Zion and then the culmination of the week with beginning of next week Easter Sunday. We hear the greatest joy of all; He is risen.

But what is Palm Sunday? It is the first day of Holy Week or Passion Week. In fact, it is also called Passion Sunday. But what is it really all about? I'm glad you ask let me take you back in time and replay the account of Palm Sunday and Jesus entering Jerusalem

using all four gospels to get the complete picture. Jesus spent Saturday, the Sabbath, at Bethany with Mary, Martha and Lazarus whom He has just raised from the dead. While sitting down for the day's meal, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with pure nard a very expensive perfume and then wiped His feet with her hair. The next day was the first day of the week, Sunday, and Jesus headed out for Jerusalem, which was about a two-mile walk. He sent two disciples ahead of Him to the little town of Bethphage and told them, "You will find a colt tied there which no one has ever ridden on. Untie it bring it here. If any one asks you why are you untying it tell him the Lord needs it."

Now why does Jesus do this? Well there are three reasons. In the book of Matthew, Matthew tells us plainly, "Jesus did this to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet." And then Matthew quotes Zechariah 9:9 which we heard in our Old Testament reading today. Secondly, a colt or young donkey that had never been ridden on was regarded as especially suitable for religious purposes. Jesus is going to be making a very big religious statement; we'll talk more about that in a little bit. And then third, a colt is a lowly animal it symbolizes peace. Jesus did not come riding into Jerusalem on a horse, the sign of victory or conquest He came in on a donkey a symbol of peace. Kings would enter a city on a donkey when they came in peace or to sign a peace treaty. Jesus is coming to make peace between God and sinful mankind.

As Jesus now comes down the Mount of Olives, which isn't really a mountain its more of a very gentle hill, a very large crowd comes out of Jerusalem to meet Him. They do three things. They take off their cloaks and put them on the ground in front of Jesus. This is royal homage it is customary to do this when a king entered. We see an example of this in 2 Kings 9:13. So they treat Jesus like a king. Second, they go into the fields and they cut branches they wave them and spread them on the road too. John records that these branches were palm branches. To the Jewish people the palm branch is a symbol of freedom the palm branch was the symbol, or the coat of arms of the McCabe family, who led a revolt that resulted in the retaking of the temple. And also they freed Judah from foreign rule in 164 b.c. When this was done the palm branch was waved, as a symbol of freedom to the Jewish people the palm branch is the equivalent of our stars and stripes, it represents freedom. Thirdly they cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who

comes in the name of the Lord Hosanna in the highest!" Hosanna here is more of a political term than a religious one it means "O Lord save."

Now, before I go any further let me share one very important fact about this day. This Sunday is the first day of Passover week it was called Lamb Selection Day. This was the day a Jewish family would select the lamb that would be used in the Passover feast the lamb whose blood would symbolize and remind them of their deliverance from Egypt. The people knew that this lamb also represented the coming Messiah that is why on this day the priests would leave the door to the temple open so that if God's lamb, the Messiah would come on this day, Lamb Selection Day. The temple would be ready for Him. In fact, the historian Josephus records that on Lamb Selection Day the Romans increased their troop numbers in the Antonio Fortress, which was adjacent to the temple. They did this because it was on this day that many people did come claiming to be the Messiah. They would come into Jerusalem and incite the people to revolt and follow them.

Now lets pull it all together. Jesus' response to all of this to the people putting the jackets down, to the people waving the palm branches to the people crying out, "Hosanna Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest!" He reacts in two ways. First when the Jewish leaders tell Him to get the crowds quiet because they are in fear of a riot Jesus says if he did that the stones would cry out. Why? Matthew has it right, prophecy had to be fulfilled. If the people didn't cry then God would provide the voices. God never leaves prophecy unfulfilled. Then second He looks over Jerusalem and He weeps. What? He weeps? Why would He do that this is an exciting time. People are singing His praises they are honoring Him as the king. That's exactly why He weeps. The people are honoring as their earthly king their version of a Messiah who will deliver them from Rome and make them free and make them the world power. But, this is lamb selection day and as I said Jesus is making a very strong and powerful religious statement. God is presenting Jesus as His lamb that He has selected for the ultimate fulfillment of Passover not the Passover of the angel of death in Egypt but the passing over of God's judgment on mankind for their sin. Jesus came to be the sacrificial lamb whose blood would pay the price of sin, which is death, and secure our atonement with God. When the people cried out "Hosanna Lord save us" they just were

interested in being saved from Rome they weren't interested in why Jesus was here. In fact, a little later in the week they will reject Jesus as their true savior and as a result Jesus knows they will be destroyed in 37 years when the Romans come and wipe out Jerusalem. So Jesus is filled with sorrow and remorse for these wayward, misled, doomed people.

Today is Lamb Selection Day. Who do you see? Do you see Jesus as John the Baptist did? John said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." If this is who you see we will celebrate the freedom He has won for us today not by waving palm branches but as we join in Holy Communion and as we in our hearts say, "Hosanna O Lord save us through your lamb Jesus Christ, the lamb of God."

In our Savior's name, Amen.