

What Kind of Savior Do You Need?

A Palm Sunday Talk by the Rev. Malcolm G. Smith

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Readings

Matthew 21:1-17

¹ And when [Jesus and the disciples] came near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village across from you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied up, and a colt with her. When you have untied them, bring them to Me. ³ And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say that the Lord has need of them; and he will immediately send them." ⁴ And all this was done in order to fulfill the prophecy declared by the prophet, saying,

⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King is coming to you, meek, and mounted upon a donkey, and a colt, the son of her that is used to the yoke."

⁶ And the disciples went, and did as Jesus directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their garments on them, and they had Him sit on them. ⁸ And a crowd of very many spread their own clothes on the road; and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went in front, and the crowds who followed behind, cried out, saying,

"Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' Hosanna in the highest!"

¹⁰ And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was shaken, saying, "Who is this?"

¹¹ And the crowd said, "This is Jesus, the Prophet from Nazareth of Galilee."

¹² And Jesus went into the temple of God, and threw out all those who sold and bought in the

temple, and overturned the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ And He said to them, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a 'cave of robbers.'"

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to Him there in the temple; and He healed them. ¹⁵ But the chief priests and the scribes were indignant seeing the amazing things which He did, and the children crying out in the temple, and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" ¹⁶ And they said to Him, "Do you hear what these children are saying?"

But Jesus says to them, "Yes. Have you never read, that 'out of the mouths of infants and sucklings you have perfected praise?'"

¹⁷ And leaving them, He went out of the city to Bethany, and stayed there.

True Christianity 142

Generally speaking, the Divine actions and powerful effects [of the Lord], which are meant by the Holy Spirit, are the acts of reforming us and regenerating us. Depending on the outcome of this reformation and regeneration, the Divine actions and powerful effects also include renewing us, bringing us to life, making us holy, and making us just; and depending on the outcome of these in turn, ... purifying us from evils, forgiving our sins, and ultimately saving us. These are the powerful effects, one after the other, that the Lord has on people who believe in Him and who adapt and modify themselves in order to welcome Him and have Him dwell in them. This is done by means of the Divine truth.

Introduction

- We're celebrating Palm Sunday today and one of the things to notice about Palm Sunday is all the people involved.
 - There were so many people involved that it says that the whole city of Jerusalem was shaken by this event (Matthew 21:10).
 - And, within all those people, there a lot of different groups.
- We can imagine the Lord, who knows every single person's heart and every single person's thoughts (see Matthew 9:4, *et al.*), looking at each of the people as He rode that donkey into Jerusalem.
 - Imagine the Lord seeing His disciples' faces as the procession got going – seeing their excitement, knowing that they had some selfish ambitions, and also knowing how hard the next week or so was going to be for them.
 - Imagine the Lord seeing the crowd of people cheering for Him – maybe seeing some of the people that He had healed, and some of the people who had heard His teachings and been changed by them, and seeing also some people who He could tell were just excited about the idea of showing the Romans who was boss.
 - Imagine the Lord seeing some of the chief priests and scribes in the crowd and the dark, angry expressions on their faces – knowing their self-righteous indignation, knowing their fears and their doubts and their worry that their hold on power was under threat.
 - Imagine the Lord's grief for each of those people who would not turn and follow Him but would stubbornly keep doing hellish and harmful things.
 - And imagine the Lord seeing the children, caught up in all the excitement, innocently running and cheering and repeating the words that they'd heard the adults saying, "Hosanna to the son of David!"
 - Imagine a smile coming to the Lord's face as He felt the sweetness of their innocence.
- Those were some of the people that the Lord came to save over two-thousand years ago.
 - Today, as we celebrate Palm Sunday in 2024, let's think about the people that the Lord is coming to save today.
 - First, we'll talk about the Lord coming to save you.
 - And then we'll talk about the Lord coming to save the people around you.

The Lord is Coming to Save You

- If I say that the Lord is coming to save you, you might say, "From what?"
 - Good question.
 - What do you need saving from?
 - What do you need help with?
 - What kind of Savior do you need?
- I'm guessing that you know some *right* answers to these questions, but I want us to start by focusing on some answers that might feel like *wrong* answers.
 - I'll tell you why.
 - The "wrong answers" can help us to realize the things that we really care about, the places where we feel like we need the most help and places where we might not realize that the Lord can help us.
 - We might know that the Lord can save us from our sins, save us from hell, save us from breaking the 10 commandments and we might know that those are good and important things but they can also feel irrelevant to the stuff where we feel like we need the most help.
- So let's brainstorm some "wrong answers" to the question of what help we need from the Lord.
 - To think about this, let's imagine a magical genie who can grant wishes appeared to you.
 - What would you wish for?
 - Endless money?
 - No more having to do work – no more schoolwork, homework, or chores?
 - For the adults, how about no more doing paperwork or answering emails?
 - Or maybe it would be no more having fights at home, or at school, or at work.
 - Or maybe it would be asking the genie to use magical power to end some of the biggest, scariest problems in the world – no more wars, no more sickness, no more bad people doing bad things.
- If you asked some of the people who were there on Palm Sunday two thousand years ago what they wished for, they would have said, "to overthrow the Romans!"
 - That was what they were hoping the Lord would do.
 - They were hoping that He was the promised Messiah who would sort of magically conquer the Romans and restore the Jews to power.
 - The Lord knew that they had this wrong idea and He worked to gradually show some of them that His kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36) and that the real kingdom to focus on was the kingdom of heaven.
 - And, even though the Lord did not overthrow the Romans for them, if they followed Him and did what He taught them, that would have helped them to be more peaceful on the inside, even as they dealt with the real challenges of being ruled over by the Romans.

How Might the Lord Save Us in These Areas?

- Let's think about how the Lord might be able to help us and save us in some of the areas that we might wish were different.
 - The passage we read in the lessons from the teachings of the New Church listed a bunch of Divine actions and powerful effects that the Lord can do for us, including reforming us and regenerating us, which means really changing how our minds think and also changing our hearts and how they love.
 - The list also includes making us new, bringing us to life, making us holy, making us just, purifying us from evils, forgiving our sins, and saving us.
- So, endless money – do you think the Lord will magically give us that? Probably not.
 - But people do experience a lot of fear and anxiety about money and the Lord can definitely help us with that.
 - And the Lord can change our minds and hearts towards money and things so that we're more content with what we have if we don't have as much as we would like.
 - And the Lord can help us to be more generous and giving with the money that we do have.
- How about no more schoolwork, homework, chores, paperwork, or answering emails? Do you think the Lord will magically get rid of those? Again, probably not.
 - But do you think that the Lord could change how we think and how we feel about the work we have to do and help us to be able to do what we need to do with less frustration and more peace? I think so.
- How about wishing to have no more fights at home, or at school, or at work?
 - Wouldn't that be nice?
 - How can the Lord save us from these hard situations?
 - It's hard to say because fights with other people can be so different, depending on the people involved and what all has happened.
 - In some fights, the Lord might help us figure out how to get the help that we need from other people to figure out what to do.
 - In other fights, the Lord might help us figure out how forgive the other person for the mean things that they've done to us.
 - In other fights, the Lord might be able to help purify us from evils by helping us see where we've messed up and helping us apologize and try to do better.
 - If we want the Lord to come and save us, then we will need to, as the passage said, "adapt and modify [ourselves] in order to welcome Him and have Him dwell in [us]."
 - When the Lord rode into Jerusalem as a King, He wasn't there to just parade through town and leave – He immediately went to throw people out of the temple of God.
 - Sometimes being saved by the Lord is going to feel like He's knocking over tables and kicking people out of seats within us.

- How about wishing that some of the biggest and scariest things in world would end, like wars, sickness, bad people doing bad things etc.? Can the Lord save us from those things?
- Let's read two passages about the Lord's care for us:
 - *Secrets of Heaven* 8560
 - Divine Providence is different from any other kind of leading or guidance in that it constantly has in view what is eternal and is constantly leading to salvation. It does so through various states, sometimes joyful and at other times miserable, which we cannot possibly comprehend; but still those states all make a contribution towards our eternal life.
 - *Secrets of Heaven* 3200
 - [P]eople who are regenerating... are not reborn all at once but constantly throughout their life and even in the other life.
- These passages are saying that the Lord is constantly working towards what is best for each of us in the long run, and that these things all take time, and that things can sometimes feel pretty miserable in the moment.
- But the Lord can help us and save us – even in these hardest and scariest areas of our lives – by helping change our minds and change our hearts about them:
 - helping us figure out what things we *can* do to help with these worldwide problems;
 - helping us hand over the rest to the Lord and trust in Him;
 - and helping us view things a bit more from the Lord's eternal perspective.
- There's a lot more to talk about with these huge topics but the invitation for today is to think about how the Lord can help you in this area, even if He's not going to wave a magic wand and make the problems disappear.
- Now let's talk about the other people the Lord coming to save today: the people around you.

The Lord is Coming to Save the People Around You

- The passage that we read in the lessons about all of the different things that the Lord does for us, goes on to say this:
 - *True Christianity* 142
 - It is important to know that the Lord is carrying out these salvation processes in every single one of us all the time. They are the steps to heaven. The Lord wants to save everyone; His purpose is to save all people.
 - It is important to know that – to know that the Lord wants to help and save every single person we'll ever meet (and also billions and billions more people that we'll never meet).
 - Just like the Lord knew, understood, and loved every single person He saw in the crowd of people as He rode into Jerusalem, the Lord knows, understands, and deeply loves every single person that we'll ever meet.
- I invite you to think about this, in a few minutes, when we go outside for the procession.
 - Look around at all of the people who will be standing there, feeling a bit cold, waving palm branches and singing.
 - Some of those people you know very well (like the members of your family and your good friends); some of them you know a little bit; and some of them you don't know at all.
 - Some of them are struggling with the exact same things that you're struggling with and some of them are struggling with totally different things.
 - Think about those people being like the people in the crowd when the Lord came riding into Jerusalem.
 - Think about the Lord's love for each of those people.
 - Think about the Lord fully understanding each of them and working constantly to make them new and bring them to life.
 - Think of the Lord purifying them from evils and forgiving their sins.
 - Think of the Lord being the exact kind of Savior that they need.
 - We're all at different places in our lives but we can all look to the Lord together and we can see a picture of that when stand together and sing about Him being our King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
 - What a wonderful thing to get to celebrate on Palm Sunday!
- *Amen.*

If you would like to talk more about this topic, get in touch with Malcolm at malcolm.smith@brynathynchurch.org.