

“Bow down”
Revelation 5:6-14
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April 10, 2022 Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday is a day of worship. Jesus enters Jerusalem to shouts of Hosanna. The adoring crowd proclaims that he is the king of Israel. Even though he comes gentle and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey, the overwhelming consensus is that Jesus is worthy of praise and adoration. One of the great mysteries of Palm Sunday is how an adoring crowd can turn so quickly into a crowd calling for Jesus to be crucified. You could almost wonder, “What’s the truth?” Is it the calls for coronation? Or is it the calls for crucifixion? So this morning we turn to Revelation as a way to clear up any confusion. The calls for coronation are correct.

When John receives the revelation of what will soon take place, and a door is opened into heaven, and we are given a vision of a throne, and when the 24 elders have flung themselves to the ground and have sung their praises to the one who sits on the throne, all of which takes place in Revelation chapter 4, we then find in Revelation chapter 5, that standing at the center of the throne, intimately connected and related to the Lord God Almighty, is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. And yet as soon as we are introduced to the Lion, we see that standing at the center of the throne is someone very un-lionlike. It is a Lamb. Standing in the center of the throne in heaven is a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain. When that Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, takes the scroll from the one seated on the throne, all the living creatures and the twenty-four elders, and ones numbering thousands upon thousands, and indeed every creature in heaven and on earth, falls down before the Lamb. Who got it right about Jesus? Those who wanted a coronation or those who wanted a crucifixion. Well, knowing that the Lamb was slain, that Jesus was crucified, I guess you could say those who called for his crucifixion got it right. But now knowing what we know from Revelation, that all creation will bow down to the Lamb who was slain, we really must say

those who called for his coronation were correct. Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Palm Sunday is such a central part of our Christian tradition, such a central part of the gospel story, it is included in each of the four gospel accounts. My bible has a heading for Matthew chapter 21 that reads, "Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King." And then Matthew tells us of that glorious day when the crowds shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" My bible has a heading for Mark chapter 11 that reads, "Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King". And then Mark tells us of that glorious day when the crowds shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" My bible has a heading for Luke chapter 19, beginning in verse 28 that reads, "Jesus comes to Jerusalem as King." And then Luke tells us of that glorious day when the crowds shouted, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" My bible has a heading for John chapter 12, beginning in verse 12 that reads, "Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King." And then John tells us of that glorious day when the crowds shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!" Jesus comes to Jerusalem as the King, and each gospel gloriously portrays that day.

Today we are reading the Palm Sunday passage as it is recounted in the gospel of John. Although all four gospels tell of the same glorious parade, how they tell it is marked by small differences. Matthew tells us the crowd cut branches from trees and spread them on the ground. In Mark we read people spread branches they had cut in the fields. In Luke we read only about cloaks being spread on the road. No branches in Luke. Reading Matthew, Mark, and Luke, you might well wonder, "Why do we call it Palm Sunday?" We have John to thank for that. Hear again the account of that glorious day as told by John. "The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!'" It is John who names the branches. John lets us know they were palm branches.

There is also something in John's account of what we call Holy Week, the days that begin with the shouts of coronation on Palm Sunday and end with the cries for crucifixion on Good Friday, there is something about John's account of Holy Week that strikes me as peculiarly powerful. John seemingly cannot wait to get to the passion, to the events where Jesus gives his life as an atoning sacrifice, to that moment when Jesus shows the greatest love, the love that would lay down its own life for the sake of others, the sacrifice that would show the full extent of God's love. The next time you are reading the gospel accounts of Palm Sunday, think about this.

Jesus enters Jerusalem to the shouts of Hosanna in Luke 19:28, about halfway through the 19th chapter. Jesus then sits at table for the Passover Meal in Luke 22, verse 7. The entrance to Jerusalem is recorded by Mark at the beginning of chapter 11. Then in Mark 14:12 Jesus sits at table for the Passover Meal. Matthew begins chapter 21 by telling of the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. It is not until chapter 26 and verse 17 that Jesus sits at table for the Passover Meal. In all the other accounts of the gospel, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the days between Palm Sunday and the Last Supper are filled with stories and challenges to the authority of Jesus and movements back and forth between Bethany and the Mount of Olives. Anywhere from two and a half chapters in Luke to nearly five whole chapters in Matthew are devoted to the time between Palm Sunday and the Last Supper.

For whatever reason, John just can't wait that long. Jesus enters Jerusalem in John 12 and by the opening verses of the very next chapter, John 13, Jesus is gathered with his disciples for their Last Supper. Unlike the other gospel accounts, even though this is the Last Supper as told to us by John, the emphasis is not on the meal, not on the bread, not on the cup, as vitally important as they are. John's Last Supper leaves out parts that play a central role in our understanding of the final Passover meal. At the same time, what John races to, what John literally can't wait to tell us, is something Jesus does at that Last Supper that John begins telling us about in chapter 13.

To get the full impact of what John tells us in chapter 13, I want to briefly review the events of Palm Sunday. Everyone bows down and

calls Jesus the King! Everyone bows down to Jesus. We also took a quick look at Revelation chapter 5. I want to briefly review the events of Revelation 5. Everyone bows down to Jesus. Jesus, the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world, is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and as it rightly should be, everyone bows down to Jesus. Of course, everyone bows down to Jesus. Jesus is the King of kings! Jesus is the Lord of lords.

All of which makes the events and the actions of John 13 a revelation in its own right. You see, in John 13, a passage John raced to get to, a passage John literally could not wait to tell us about, “Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” (John 13:4,5) Without saying it in so many words, Jesus, the King of kings, Jesus, the Lord of lords, bows down and washes the feet of his disciples. In this one event, with this one action, an action of service, an act of being the servant, all the kingdoms of this earth suffer a massive displacement of power and purpose. Jesus turns the kingdom completely upside down. The king becomes the servant. And John just can’t wait to tell us about this absolutely amazing act done by none other than the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Lamb of God who stands at the center of the throne in heaven. Our King, Jesus Christ, is a servant. Friends, that means we are a kingdom of servants. The one who wants to be the greatest must learn to be the servant of all. And if you want to know what it means to serve, if you want to know how to serve others, look no further than Jesus, the King who bows down and offers his life in service to others.

Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is Jesus, who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is Jesus, the King who comes to serve. Hosanna in the highest! Amen.