

Sermon for Morning Prayer Palm Sunday

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the ninth Chapter of Zechariah.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.

“And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage [**Beth-FAH-geh**] and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed [**STREWD**] them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that

cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed [STREWD] them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord....” In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

The 1943 Lectionary gives two alternative sets of Lessons for Morning Prayer today. The first is the one we are using, in which the Second Lesson is St. Mark’s familiar account of Our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of His life here on Earth. This is the version which forms part of the traditional Blessing of the Palms at Holy Communion on this day.

The First Lesson in this set is Zechariah’s prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, the details of which were duplicated in Our Lord’s actual procession into the city, thus signaling to all the well-instructed Jews who were witnesses that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah whose coming was predicted so many times in those Jews’ Bible which is our Old Testament.

In the second set of Lessons, however, the Second Lesson does not mention palm fronds, colts of asses, or triumphal parades at all. Instead, its seventy-five verses are the first part of St. Matthew’s account of Our Lord’s Passion, starting well after that triumphal entry. This account begins with the dinner at which a woman anointed Our Lord’s feet with costly ointment and ending with St. Peter’s triple denial that he was Jesus’s disciple.

Theme:

Think about that: on this Sunday, which is dedicated to the remembrance of Our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, one of the authorized Lessons tells us instead of the tragic events that ended that week: His betrayal, arrest, and delivery for trial before His enemies.

Development:

Jesus rode into the city on the humblest beast of burden known to His society: an ass, rather than the pedigreed horse or costly racing camel that a rich merchant, high military officer, or secular ruler might have ridden. In fact, it was not even a full-grown donkey well-trained for a rider's comfort, it was a young one, one that had never been ridden.

Just as His steed was not one an elite member of His society would have chosen, so was it not caparisoned with the rich decorative cloths such a person would have used.

Instead, it was covered with the humble clothes of the poor for whose comfort and spiritual liberation He had come. He and His ass did not ride into the city over a ruler or conqueror's avenue of costly carpets, they rode over humble greenery chopped from the roadside trees.

Most importantly, Jesus did not ride to a great feast, or to a triumphal celebration, He rode to the arrest and death that is the subject of today's alternate Second Lesson.

In every way, this journey was the antithesis of a triumph. The usual signs of financial, military, and political power were turned inside out to show that this Man's Kingdom was not of this world but of the next, this Man was not the ruler of dirt and rocks but of men's souls. This Man came not to impose taxes and raise armies but to bring hope and forgive sins. This Man's gifts to the crowd were not scattered coins bearing His own face but the offer of eternal life. He did not come to make these people His servants or subjects, He came to be their Servant and to die for them.

The crowd, of course, did not understand that. The crowd welcomed Him with shouts of praise and did its best to give Him the honors due a secular king because it believed He would lead a military and political revolt against the Roman occupiers.

In five short days, after the crowd perceived that His realm was not an earthly one, that His liberation was a spiritual and not a material one, their enraged disappointment would turn Sunday's shouts of "Hosanna" into Friday's screams of "Crucify him".

Conclusion:

Therefore, as we remember the celebrations on that first Palm Sunday, let us also remember that the Man who calmly rode through that cheering crowd was the only one present who knew that He was riding to His death.

Yet He rode to it anyway, that we might be saved.

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*The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister
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1 Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

2 Zechariah 9:9-12 (KJV).

3 St. Mark 11:1-11 (KJV).

4 St. Mark 11:7-9 (KJV); cf. St. Matthew 21:1-11, St. Luke 19:29-38, St. John 12:12-15.

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