

St. Bartholomew’s Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins, Curate

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11a

“A Reception Fit for a King!”

JESUS – THE KING OF KINGS:

We are about to begin our annual recollection of what very well could be described as the most difficult week in the life of the church – and what *must* be described as the most difficult week in the earthly life of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I am sure that the vivid details of Christ’s Passion lie in each of our memories – and help us to recall the incredible sacrifice that He made for each of us, personally. Without the events of Maundy Thursday there would have been no Good Friday – and without the events of Good Friday – there would be no Easter Sunday. My brothers and sisters – without the events of Palm Sunday and the world’s recognition of *Jesus as the King of Kings* – Holy Week and its unfolding events might have indeed been quite different. **Along with the palms are the seeds of the passion and crucifixion.** As we prepare for the coming Holy Week – we need to examine more closely the journey from Bethany to Jerusalem, which ultimately led to Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the Tomb.

This journey to Jerusalem began at the city of Jericho. If you have ever been to the Holy Land you know that the journey from Jericho involves a very long, hard climb. Jericho, near the Dead Sea is the lowest city on the face of the earth – over **800 feet below sea level** – and Jerusalem, only about 15 miles away, is **about 3,000 feet above sea level**. All four of the Holy Gospels relay to us the account of Jesus and the apostles ending up at Bethany – on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the city of Jerusalem. I can just imagine the excitement they felt nearing their destination – Jerusalem – for the Passover celebration. Little did the apostles know that they were also approaching what would be the most harrowing and gut wrenching week of their lives.

Thousands of Jews had traveled from all over – just to come to God’s Holy City –

- where God Almighty had chosen to place His Name and His Presence;
- the holy place of sacrifice and forgiveness,
- The place of hope for their future.
- Jews had come to Jerusalem to celebrate and commemorate their freedom from bondage.

The long climb to Jerusalem was a climb, for many, seeking the Kingdom of God.

BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES THE IN THE NAME OF THE LORD:

When you stand on the Mount of Olives – looking at the walled city of Jerusalem – you are literally captivated by the very center of the wall- where there is a double portal –called the “Golden Gate” or the “Peace Gate.” In the year 2000, the ground near this gate collapsed revealing the ancient gate directly below the newer one built by the Turks. In the time of Jesus there was a stone bridge across the Kidron Valley leading from the Garden of Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives over to the Golden Gate. According to tradition this probably was the route that Jesus used to enter the city, on several occasions, but especially on His triumphant entry, riding the colt of a donkey from Bethany into the city. The current Golden Gate had been walled up – and closed – because of the traditions and prophecies that say that the Messiah will enter Jerusalem through that very gate. The Turks and Moslems sealed it up so that He would not be able to enter. Well, I would say that they are a little late....He already has – Praise God. Besides, if Jesus wanted to go through – do you really think that a few stone blocks would stop Him? The fact remains that the Messiah, the Anointed One of God has already triumphantly entered the gates of Jerusalem – to the cries of “*Baruch Haba Beshem Adonai* – Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Jesus, rode down the Mount of Olives and into Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey, a colt, in fulfillment of the words from the Prophet Zechariah (9:9) “*Your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*” To top it all off – the people do something astonishing. You see in the dry, dusty, and stony Middle East you don’t spread your cloaks on the road for a friend, or even a well respected senior member of your family: you do it only for royalty. You don’t cut off branches of trees to wave out in the street for a celebration, but instead this was reserved for the arrival of and welcoming of a king. Two hundred years before, Judas Maccabaeus defeated Syrian King Antiochus, entered Jerusalem, cleansed the Temple from the unholy pagan desecration – and the people waved palm branches. Now, here was Jesus of Nazareth, Son of the Living God, entering Jerusalem:

- to the Hosannas,
- to the celebration,
- the joy,
- the delight of the people.

Ironically, not too long after this “royal palm waving event,” Jesus would enter the Temple and He would again cleanse the Temple of things unholy.

The term Hosanna is a Hebrew word that mixes exuberant praise to Almighty God with a prayer for God to save His people – and right now. The cheerful chant that the people give begins and ends with words that bring to mind Psalm 118:24-26 “*This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.*” The people insert a very dangerous prayer in the middle of their chant- “*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!*” The Son of Man had come to the Holy City of God, the place called the City of David – and was recognized as king, but they are not ready for this kind of King. They were expecting a deliverer, a conqueror and not at all expecting what was before them; the events of the coming week – when this King would radically redefine Kingship and royalty – a model for royalty that neither Israel nor the rest of the world were used to – and dare I say it – ready for. The people, with their chanting, were bestowing kingship in the line of the house of David, and **in less than 6 days Jesus would receive the crown – of thorns.**

This passage of Scripture should raise for us questions about our own following of Jesus and our loyalty to Him.

- Are we ready to give Him our all?
- Are we ready to obey His orders even when they puzzle us?
- Are we ready to go out of our way to honor Him, finding in our own lives what might be the equivalent of cloaks to spread out on the road before Him, and branches to wave to make His coming into a real festival?
- Or on the other hand has our Christian commitment become so “every day matter of fact”?
- Is our devotion to Him become so “second nature” that we look to Him as only someone who can help us through the things that we really want to do, and as someone who provides for us comforting religious experiences?

NO ROYALTY HERE:

We live in a country where it has been about 230 years since there has been any association with royalty; we have no king or queen – not even a prince. As a matter of fact - we have no clue how we

should behave, how we should react in the presence of **real royalty!** When the people of Israel recognized Him – even if it was short lived – they paid Jesus the highest of honors – chanting and recognizing the King before them. I ask you – as we celebrate this Holy Day – and prepare for this Holy Week – how can each one of us best recognize the King of our lives – and proclaim His holiness and royalty – not just today – but always? How can we give Him a reception fit for a King?

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO YOU?

I want to suggest to you this morning that reacting to Jesus’ kingship must involve a call to repentance: **Repentance means to change one’s mind or purpose.** In terms of His kingdom, it involves:

- **A change in one’s allegiance:** If Christ is our King, He deserves our honor, loyalty, and obedience. Whatever He says, we must be determined to do. That’s what the words of the Lord’s Prayer are all about, “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matthew: 6:10). **People of the King submit their own will to the will of the King.**
- **A change in one’s expectations:** The world today seems to grow farther away from God by the day. It is so easy to **live for the here and now**, as if today is all that matters. But the hope of the kingdom is that there is **so much more to life than what we see right now.** Jesus made promises in regard to a future kingdom, not only for Israel, but for all who follow Him as King. The kingdom may not be fulfilled completely, but it has been established and will last forever (Matthew 6:13).
- **A change in one’s values:** Our culture puts so much stock in achievement, success, independence, and image, while other cultures value other qualities. But the values of Christ’s Kingdom reflect what matters to the King. Jesus described a number of His values in the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. **Kingdom people adopt the King’s values and make choices that reflect those values—in their jobs, families, and communities – all of the time.**
- **A change in one’s priorities:** It has been said that the real test of people’s values is how they spend their time and money. Jesus challenged His followers to **bring kingdom values into their day-to-day lives.** “*Seeking first the kingdom*” (Matthew 6:33) puts a Christ-like perspective on one’s work and its outcomes.
- **A change in one’s own lifelong mission:** Some people are driven to accomplish great tasks with their lives. Others live just day to day, with no purpose or direction. Serving Jesus affects your outlook. He gives His followers purpose and a mission—to live as subjects of the kingdom and promote kingdom values in everyday life and work. **Jesus wants His followers to extend His message to the ends of the earth, so that all people have the opportunity to give their allegiance to Him as their Savior and King – and be transformed by Him.**

So how will you prepare your reception fit for a King?