

Sunday of the Passion – Palm Sunday, March 16, 2008, Year A

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

“Christ, Our Passover”

I am curious to see how many of you remember the year 1964? It was the year of the famous British Invasion. Well that year brought us a great deal more than the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Dave Clark Five, Herman's Hermits and boatloads of others – it also brought us a TV show from England called “That Was the Week That Was.” It was hosted by David Frost, and it took a look at the week gone by – sometimes satirically, but most times with a serious news eye. I looked forward to watching it each week – and it never disappointed me. When I look at the Gospel today – I can't help but think – from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem right through Resurrection Sunday – That Was the Week that REALLY Was! That was the week that changed history for all of us – and more importantly – it changed the eternal lives of everyone who would know and accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Risen Son of God – the Messiah. That indeed was the week that was!

What amazes me is how that week, which began with a parade in Jesus' honor turned into His execution. Talk about the tide turning! The public opinion polls would have gone crazy. We in New York State have seen first-hand, this week, how things for a man can go awry in a heartbeat.

Jesus' Triumphal entry into Jerusalem can be described as touching off a mass celebration, with applause and support of the masses. Here was Jesus, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling what was prophesied in **Zechariah 9:9** “*Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*” A donkey is an unassuming, meek animal – certainly not the kind of mount that a warrior would ride into battle or in a victory parade. Quite the contrary – this was a visible indication that Jesus' had not come to free the people from the Roman tyranny of the day – but to free them from the bondage of sin and death. If His mission was the Romans – He would have entered Jerusalem atop a large steed, in full battle dress. No, His battle is not with the Romans, but instead with Satan and his armies. There will come a time when Jesus will ride in full splendor as told in Revelation 19 – but on this day, Jesus peacefully rode from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem. The crowds lined the streets and some people threw their outer garments and the branches of trees down into the street to line the way, just as their ancestors had done years before when they welcomed Jehu as king; they “*hurried and each man took his garment and placed it under him on the bare steps, and blew the trumpet, saying, "Jehu is king!"*” (2 Kings 9:13)

On this particular day, at the beginning of the week, the people shouted to Jesus “*Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!*” (Matthew 21:9) Hosanna means “Save!” They were pleading with Jesus to deliver them from the political domination of the Romans and to become their earthly king – the son of David. By shouting “*Baruch haba beshem Adonai,*” Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord – they were acknowledging that Jesus was no ordinary person and that He had the authority and power of God Himself. This phrase – which we ourselves will repeat at the Lord's table in just a few minutes, comes directly from Psalm 118:26. They recognized that He had come from God's highest place.

This same crowd of people who were captured in the moment of festivity would be catapulted to a frenzy – calling for Jesus' execution just 5 days later. All four Gospels give the account of

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them shouting “*Crucify Him, Crucify Him!*” (Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19) after He had been beaten and scourged – His flesh torn to the bone. The king that they exalted on Sunday was the target of their scorn on Friday. In just a few days – Jesus had been praised, betrayed, denied, mocked, crowned with thorns, beaten, nailed to a cross, ridiculed, and killed. They had no idea what they were doing – or who they were doing it to – the innocent Lamb of God.

That week was the time of the Passover – when a spotless Lamb was slain in remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt at which the blood of the lamb was spilled upon the doorposts of every believing home – so that they might be delivered from the destroyer – and saved by the blood of the lamb. On that Friday – on the hill called Golgotha – Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God was slain, and His blood was spilt, not on a doorpost, but on two cross beams – so that you and I, and every believer could be saved from the destroyer – saved by the precious Blood of the Lamb of God.

It was no accident or coincidence that Jesus was crucified that day – at the very hour that the Passover lambs were being killed for the sacrifice. It was no coincidence or accident that Jesus’ last meal with His disciples was a Passover Seder – at which He instituted our Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist – with unleavened bread – symbolically free from sin. So that each time we gather at His holy table – we remember what He did for us – and rejoice in His sacrifice – once for all – “*that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*” (John 3:16) None of this was a coincidence – but instead what was taking place was the fulfillment of a plan that God put into place because of the sins of mankind. His plan of salvation – required someone to pay the price of our redemption – to pay the bounty that had been placed upon our heads – a costly price. It would require a sacrificial lamb – to take our place – and take our punishment. Jesus willingly went to the cross – and He became our Passover sacrifice – and it is by His blood that we are saved. It is for this reason that just after the Lord’s Prayer – the priest breaks the bread at the altar and proclaims the words from 1 Corinthians 5:7 “*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*” and the congregation responds with the words from 1 Corinthians 5:8 “*therefore let us keep the feast!*”

As we head into this Holy Week – may each one of us give thanks to Almighty God for what He has done for us – giving of His very Self for us, so that we might be free from the price the destroyer requires. As we think and pray this week – may we thank God that He loves us so much that through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection – we have the opportunity to spend our eternity in His presence and join in with the choirs of saints who sing these words from Revelation 5:12 “*Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!*” Christ, our Passover was sacrificed for us!