

SUNDAY, March 24, 2024 Lent 6 "He Came Riding"

Psalms 118 Mark 11:1-11, Mark 14:1-2

Tony, Trigger, Champion, Rocky Lane's Black Jack, and the Lone Ranger's Silver were some of the Wonder Horses of cinema when Western movies were popular. Western movies were supposed to depict the Wild West era of the Midwest states and yet what do we remember about this movie genre, the one with the fastest draw of guns, shooting the bad guys in the black cowboy hats and their horses. At the end of many of these movies, the victorious cowboy would mount his horse and ride out into the sunset as it was another good day.

Today is Palm Sunday and we remember the One who rode not a beautiful white horse, or champion racer but a donkey. A donkey which was a young colt, borrowed from a stranger in the community nearby. The disciples had been asked by Jesus to go into the village and get the young donkey which had never been ridden and bring it back to him. If anyone asked what they were doing, they were to say the messiah has need of it. This seemed pretty simple and this is what occurred. The disciples then brought the colt to Jesus and the disciples threw their cloaks on it. Jesus sat on.

Then the parade began—no bands, no announcers on the sidelines saying who sponsored each float, no dancers, or jugglers, no stilt walkers or acrobats, no fancy floats with lights flashing, only Jesus riding on a donkey. One can almost imagine each bump in the road, and each movement of the animal as Jesus rode the donkey from Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, into the city of Jerusalem. IT was a quiet ride until, word spread, the messiah was coming! The messiah was coming!

The people started laying out their version of the red carpet- the cloaks off their backs. What they had and was valuable to them and needed by the Master! Others climbed up the trees nearby and cut down branches. Still others spread leafy branches from the fields. Some went ahead of the man on the donkey, and others followed. All shouted, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

What were they saying? Hosanna—save us. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. This is Jesus, God's Son. The son of the the living God! He is blessed and worthy of all praise. And blessed is the coming kingdom..They believed that Jesus would bring about change to what was happening to them on earth as they had wanted David to do years before. The coming kingdom was promised by God but not in the way they expected.

There would not be a war, battle or fight or military involvement but in a calming manner, Jesus made himself known as the one who would bring change to the world. But those in the parade did not know how. They just believed in the one who was riding on a donkey.

Jesus' ride on the donkey would take time @40 minutes as it was about 2 miles. And it was during this time that the disciples would be joined with many others who knew Jesus and what he had done for them. IT was during this time that the donkey would just keep walking, and Jesus would be riding.

Recalling the sight of their master riding a beast of burden, the disciples saw the fulfilment of a prophecy by Zechariah more than 500 years before: "Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9)

But what is Jesus thinking, feeling or doing as he rides? Is he filled with laughter as people come to greet him on the outskirts of the city? Are they excite for his presence and do they want him to do something? But what? What might Jesus do as he rides the donkey?

Jesus knows what lies ahead- a few short days and he will die. But is this his focus now? Or the joy on the faces of the people whom he has come to save? It is difficult to know. But he keeps riding.

Jesus then enters Jerusalem and goes into the temple. He looks around at everything- all is as it should be. He also knows that within a few short house, this is where his actions will be seen and noticed as seeks to bring about change for all. The temple is where he has prayed many times and soon it will be the place of change.

As it was already late in the day, Jesus then makes his way out to Bethany with the twelve disciples and they return the donkey. The next morning they again start their journey back to Jerusalem. Jesus is hungry and in the distance is a fig tree. He sees it and then is angry because it does not have figs. It was not the right season for it to bear fruit. He curses the tree. They still haven't had anything to eat but they make their way to Jerusalem and to the temple.

It is here that Jesus becomes angry and overturns the tables of the money changers and merchants. IT is written Jesus said that the temple is a place of prayer, but it has become a den of thieves as the money changers were cheating the people. The chief priests and scribes heard what happened and they were looking for a way to kill him. But they were afraid because the people were listening intently to his words. As they left the city later that evening, pEter showed

jesus the fig tree he had cursed that morning. It had shriveled up. Jesus said. Have faith in God and seek forgiveness. What was he telling Peter and the disciples? Be strong in faith. There was more coming and they needed to be strong.

IN remembering Jesus ride to Jerusalem, we know what happens later that week. But in the meantime, we need to remember why Jesus rode to the city. Yes, to fulfill prophecy, to have the people express their thoughts and feelings about him, but also for Jesus to know that people listened and that his ministry was not in vain. He knew tough times were coming that week. But he also knew that God was with him.

AS we enter Holy Week, what are you reflecting on as Jesus rides to the city where he will start the changes that lead to his arrest. What is it that calls us to hear this donkey story again? Is it like a calming story to start to prepare us for the words which lead to Jesus' death?

Just what is it that jesus riding the donkey calls us to reflect upon. The people are in the street watching. The chief priests and scribes are looking for any reason to have Jesus killed. The crowd of people who wave branches and put down their cloaks are just like us. Fair weather supporters until such time, crises hit and we wonder where Jesus went. But Jesus doesn't go anywhere, it is us who decide to walk a different path. Yet God's love demands us to have justice and peace knowing that the time is right for Jesus to reveal who he is and it is because of this, Jesus rides to Jerusalem to reveal himself again. It is why he returns to the temple to teach and overturns the tables to make the point that people need to turn over their lives to God.

Are you willing to do this? Turn over your life to God and live anew? As we reflect on this part of Jesus' story, are we willing to sit at the table he has prepared for us? Are we ready to receive and know Christ Jesus again?

He came riding into Jerusalem knowing his destiny. But what is yours? Are you walking his way in life? Or are you choosing to live your way without the hope that is always found in Jesus? As we share what he asked us to do in remembrance of Him, let us remember that it is up to us to choose life in Jesus. He came riding knowing he would die—for you. Are you ready to respond in faith?

**PRAY**

God of grace and hope we praise you and thank you for Jesus. Help us to enter this holy week open to hear the message of Jesus' passion, arrest, and death. Help us to realize he did all of this for us. Bless us we pray as we offer to you our PRAYERS from the heart SILENCE> Amen.