

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Matthew 21:1-11

Branches in the Road

No Kings Protests. Now that is an interesting place to start on a Sunday when we come waving palm branches singing our hosannas, with words in the scripture identifying Jesus as Lord, your king, and Son of David. Yesterday there were "No Kings" protests globally, but perhaps the largest gathering happened just south of us in Minneapolis where people have been vocal and taking action against the Trump administration because of their policies and the killing of two people on their streets last fall.

This was not the first "No Kings" protest, this also happened just a few months ago. However, the continued policies of the Trump Administration and the war against Iran have made it so the energy around this has not waned. Millions of people once again turned out, particularly in the US, to demonstrate through their actions their frustration with a man who would like to name himself ruler of all.

It is against this backdrop that we hear scripture describing its own event of people gathering in the streets. There is no way for us to know how large this crowd was. We know it was not enough for the heavy hand of the Roman government to quell the parade in the moment, as any threat of unrest would have brought the soldiers in to deal with the situation. Instead, we are given this hopeful story. We can be sure people hadn't really figured out who this Jesus was because they ask, even as they got caught up in the event, "Who is this? (v10).

Let's get into this moment. Jesus had spent the last three years teaching, healing and feeding people. And for the last while he and the disciples have been making their way toward Jerusalem, Jesus has been dropping cues about the fact that he will die. People, particularly the disciples, haven't necessarily picked up what he has been laying down, but after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, all of this will make sense to them. For now, all of this is still unfolding.

And Jesus asks his disciples to do a strange thing, to go to the village ahead of them saying that they will immediately find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. He tells them to untie the animals and bring them back. If anyone says anything, they are just to say the Lord needs them. And it appears that no one argued with the request. That act becomes a fulfilment of scripture from Zechariah 9:9, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”¹

And this is something that is important. Jesus doesn't come out of nowhere. There are Old Testament scriptures that Christians recognize as being fulfilled in Jesus, as in Psalm 118 where we read, “The Lord is God, who has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.”²

In the time of Jesus, of kings and emperors and power of empire, the recognition of someone as a king could threaten your life. Or being called a king or the son of God made you a threat. In the end that threat to power did take Jesus to a cross, but for now the crowd, however large or small it is, is empowered, hopeful, and brave. And it is important to note that there would have been many people watching this spectacle from the sidelines, not quite brave enough to commit and not fully understanding what was going on. Even the people caught up in the laying of cloaks and branches from the trees, shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David!” likely didn't fully understand what they were a part of. In fact, it says right there in scripture, “¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” ¹¹ The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”³

Can you imagine the whispers, the questions, the turmoil? Think on any protest you have seen on a screen in recent months. Protests are not quiet, they are loud, and regardless of where they are happening in the world and whether organized or spontaneous, crowds and protests are unpredictable. There are always risks. Risk of being caught up in something that cannot be controlled, risk of arrest, and in some cases, risk to life.

When we enter into our sanctuaries, wave palm branches and sing on Palm Sunday, we get rather sentimental, but this is dangerous stuff. Even now, in our own day and age not many people are willing to say, Jesus is my Lord or Jesus is King. We hold back, we fear judgment, ridicule, or at the very least a sideway glance or roll of the eyes.

It would be safe to say that most of us have never said the words that Jesus is Lord or Jesus is King outside of a worship service. And when we walk out these doors those phrases slide off our being. We almost shake them off as we return to our work a day world. We are Christians when we come to church on Sunday, but Jesus just doesn't hold the same power when we leave this time together.

But as the people in the crowd in Jesus' time asked each other, “Who is this?” I ask you, “Who is this Jesus to you?” Just as the people laid their cloaks and branches in the road

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² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

as Jesus entered the city, do you...do we as a church, lay down our lives for Jesus? Do we offer ourselves to Jesus?

Who is this Jesus to you? I can't answer this for you. Each of us must come to our own determinations and conclusions. This church has to determine who Jesus is and what metaphorical cloaks and branches we will lay down for Jesus as we seek to be the people of God today and in the weeks and months ahead.

At this moment we are looking at the celebration of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but if we look ahead the scriptures reveal a quick turning of the tide. Jesus headed to the temple and overturned tables and drove people out who are desecrating the temple. He kept teaching, but authorities were watching and waiting in the wings ready to pounce at the first opportunity, and greed will provide that. Judas will go to the chief priest and temple authorities and make a deal. They will arrest Jesus and try him. He will die. This story gets worse before it gets better.

Through it all, where are you? When you hear this story and come to the table of Maundy Thursday, or the crucifixion of Good Friday, where are you? There is no judgement from me here. Only a question...Who is this? Who is this Jesus that for over two thousand years we have proclaimed as our King. In a time when and where earthly kings, authorities, or rulers try to control by coercion and domination, do you see the difference between Jesus as Lord, and King, and the power and domination of people on earth?

May you already know that answer. Jesus came in the power of grace, love, and forgiveness. Jesus is King. Jesus the King that comes in the power of feeding the hungry, caring for the most vulnerable, loving us because we are each and every one made in the image of God. Jesus' power is love. Love is our power because of Jesus.

Who is this? This is Jesus. This is love personified. This is the grace of God outpoured on all people. This is God with us. This is our King!

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!” Amen!