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 Palm to Passion Sunday 2018
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The Power of Love
Mark 11:1-11, selections from Mark 14-15

Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples² and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it.³ If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately."⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it,⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?"⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna!

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

¹⁰ *Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
 Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*

¹¹ *Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.*

Selections from Mark 14-15:

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ... the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷ *When it was evening, he came with the twelve.¹⁸ And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me."¹⁹ They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?"²⁰ He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread^[e] into the bowl^[f] with me.*

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

²² *While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."²³ Then he took a cup, and*

after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, "This is my blood of the ^[a] covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Peter's Denial Foretold

²⁶ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ²⁷ And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

²⁸ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." ²⁹ Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." ³⁰ Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." ³¹ But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ...he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ He said, "Abba, ^[a] Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." ³⁷ He came and found them sleeping; ...He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

⁴³ Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; ... he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁴⁶ Then they laid hands on him and arrested him.

Peter Denies Jesus

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. ^[k] Then the cock crowed. ^[l] ⁶⁹ And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." ⁷⁰ But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." ⁷¹ But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." ⁷² At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered

that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept....

15 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ² Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." ³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." ⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. ¹² Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do^[m] with the man you call^[n] the King of the Jews?" ¹³ They shouted back, "Crucify him!" ¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters^[o]); and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. ...²⁵ It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.^[q]

The Death of Jesus

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land^[r] until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"^[u] ³⁵³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he^[v] breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"^[w]

I think it's easy for us to **lose the radical impact** of Holy Week, if we focus **only on the waving** of the palms by the children, or what we call the '**triumphal entry**' of Jesus into Jerusalem.

This is both **Palm and Passion** Sunday.

It is true that Jesus came very publicly into Jerusalem at Passover. But **Mark's** Gospel, which many believe was the first one written, and the source for Matthew and Luke,

has a simple look at Palm Sunday, that we heard in Mark 11.

It reminds us
that Jesus ***didn't come in like the Roman rulers***
who would enter by the main gate into the city on a war horse.

He came riding in on a ***simple donkey***, one never ridden before.
He came, ***without*** the accompaniment of warriors,
without armor, without weapons,
without the pomp and circumstance of a political ruler
or even a Messiah who would set the people free from Roman oppression.

People ***did wave*** branches and put their clothes on the ground,
showing honor and respect.
They did shout Hosanna, which means save us.
They did consider him a celebrity of sorts,
for they had seen his miracles, and heard his teachings.

But Jesus came ***in peace, in love, not war***.
He came in ***humility***, not domination or power.
Princes rode donkeys into the city as a sign that they were coming in peace.
That's the image we have of Jesus.

And he entered the ***enemy's stronghold*** this way.
He came into the Roman occupied city, in the name of the Lord.
Not in his own power, or to oppress or control anyone.

Isn't it incredible—
that Jesus came in ***honored*** by a crowd that praised him,
only to be ***humiliated*** by them just days later?
He came in to shouts of ***Hosanna***,
only to have the people yell ***crucify him*** a few days later?
He came in ***humble acclaim***,
only to be ***completely humbled*** on the cross.

Is this the Jesus we ***know***?
Is this the Jesus we ***follow***?

Do we realize the power of what Paul says in Philippians 2,

That Jesus ***was God, but didn't use that power,***
 instead he humbled himself,
 and became obedient,
 even to death on a cross?

Do you know that Jesus had already told his disciples
 three times before entering Jerusalem,
 that he will die there?
 They did not understand.
 Can you imagine their ***confusion*** when they see his ***entrance,***
 And then, they witness what happens on ***Good Friday?***

Do we realize ***just how different God's love is,***
 from ours?

And I wonder, ***do we follow His path of love—***
 The path that Jesus sets out in ***Holy week?***

Do we come into our world, in peace?
 Do we come into our world of division, and war, ***showing peace, and love?***
 Do we witness to the power of ***justice,***
 The power of ***humility,***
 in a ***culture that glorifies, division, oppression, and hate?***

HOW?
 HOW do we do that?
Only with the help of Jesus, right?

Jesus is the one, who shows us ***peace*** in the face of war.
 He shows us ***dignity and integrity,***
 in the face of violence and oppression.

Isn't it striking, just how ***different the path of Jesus is---***
 Compared to the way our world works?

We need only watch, read, or listen to ***anything going on*** in our world,
 And instantly—can't you just ***hear and see the difference?***

We tolerate, and even glorify violence, oppression, and arrogance...

And it's not just **them** out there---it's **us, in here**.

Rev. Chuck Horton preached a beautiful sermon at Journey to Easter, about how the **two different criminals** crucified on either side of Jesus represent different kinds of people.

Remember how one **derided Jesus**—*if you are the Messiah, save yourself!*
And the other said, *Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.*

Jesus **didn't defend** himself to the first man.
But to the second criminal he made this promise:
Today you will be with me in paradise.

Those **two criminals** are different kinds of people—
those who see **cynicism, and anger** in the people around them,
and those who see **hope and peace**.
But they also represent the **two sides in each and every one of us**.
We are both of those criminals.
We are all **sinners**, in need of Christ's salvation,
And we have both the **good and the bad** in our hearts, don't we?

None of us is without sin.
And the hate and violence and evil we see in other people,
well Chuck reminded us on Friday,
that all too often, **what we see in others says more about us, than them.**

If we **see only the negative**,
Are we really suffering from too much negativity in our own hearts?
And if we see what is good and hopeful,
Aren't our hearts filled with that?

We have a **choice** in this life.
About how we **approach** this crazy **world** we live in,
And the crazy **people** around us.
(and remember, we are those people!)

Jesus saved us on the cross, that we might be **dead to sin**,
And **alive to all that is good.**

So, do we *live like that*?
Do we *see the world* that way?

Jesus entered the evil of this world, *to destroy sin, and death*,
And to bring *new and eternal life*!

But *are we walking in that amazing grace*?
Are we *living out* that calling?

Do we *look into the face of all that is not good* in this world,
And greet it—with His message of *peace and hope*?

Do we bring the *love of Christ*, His *amazing grace*,
Into a world, and into the hearts of the very people who need it?
And don't WE need it?

This is a little *dangerous*, if we're honest.
Our *world does not want* to hear about peace, hope, or love, does it?
That doesn't sell newspapers, or make cable television shows, right?

And it's *so, so much easier to complain* about what we see,
To be *negative*.
To see the world for the *mess* that it is.
I turn on news, and turn it off thinking, enough.
I'm tired of it all.
And it's all too easy to *just complain* about all the lies and corruption and
violence, right?

But what are *we doing about it*?
How will we be the voices, the witnesses,
to truth, and dignity, and integrity?
To *peace, and hope, and love*?

Isn't that the Jesus we know?
Didn't he come, to bring that *grace and goodness*,
Right in the midst of suffering and humility?

And that same Jesus said,
take up your cross, and follow me!

Wow.

It IS a messy world out there.
 And there is so much suffering.
 So much humiliation.
 So much oppression.
 So much injustice.

What can we do?

I want to suggest, that Holy Week gives us an answer.

For when we hear the story of ***Palm Sunday*** and his triumphal entry,
 It is directly connected to the story you heard about the ***cross!***

The way he came in, is a direct path to the way he left this earth.

Humbly, in peace, in love.

Sometimes we don't attend Maundy Thursday or Good Friday services
 during Holy Week.

So we can easily go from watching children wave ***palm branches,***
 to the empty tomb on ***Easter*** morning.

But if we don't hear the whole story of that last week, ***we miss the story!***

We miss the ***heart of the story.***

For we ***cannot understand*** the glory of new life and resurrection,
 without the ***humility and suffering*** of Jesus.

When we have the ***whole story,*** it makes ***all the difference,*** right?

What better place, to learn how to resist evil with love!

Our culture says resist evil with evil.

Fight back.

Get revenge.

Lie, if you have to.

Our Savior says resist evil with ***peace, hope, and love.***

Our Savior says resist oppression and injustice,

Through ***grace and mercy.***

Meet violence with ***non-violence.***

Hatred, with ***love.***

Death, with ***life.***

To be this way,
requires us being **vulnerable**.
Which is a word so many of us want to avoid.
Who wants to be vulnerable?

Yet that's exactly **what Jesus was**, from beginning to end.
He entered the world as a little **baby**,
he entered Jerusalem **without weapons** or armor,
even as many considered him an enemy and a threat.

And he left the world on a cross,
as a common criminal,
guilty of nothing.

His death does not mean that all suffering is good.
It does mean that **God is present in suffering**.
And somehow, even there,
we can find the love, and peace, and hope of God.

The love of the world is sure different from the love of Jesus, isn't it?
God's love is **redemptive, and renewing**.
It is **radical and revolutionary**.

The **Good News of the Gospel is** that
This week—**our Jesus comes in peace**,
He comes in **hope**,
He comes in **love**.
Into Jerusalem, onto the cross, and into our hearts.
May we **follow Him**, Amen.