

### PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

Mark 11: 1 – 11 April 5, 2009

Pilgrim Bud Precise

It is the time of Passover. Pilgrims make their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival. Mark's account of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem seems to be spontaneous. The excitement shown by the crowd of pilgrims demonstrates the hope for salvation. We have just experienced a change in government. Whenever a new administration takes office, or when a new religious leader is installed, people speak of their hopes for an order that is different from the past. And this Palm Sunday crowd focuses their hope on Jesus. Pilgrims to Jerusalem for the Passover would be particularly conscious of God as the one who liberates the people. They needed a symbol, and this demonstration is a powerful one of their expectation of Jesus as King, the Coming One. The announcement on this day was the messiah ship of Jesus. The pilgrims would remember the last King who was welcomed into Jerusalem with palms and coats on the road. That would be King Jehu, a conquering war king coming home to Jerusalem.

How do we understand this story? Messiahship, Kingship, was certainly on the mind of the crowd who welcomed him, who had their hopes that he would be the one to restore the Kingdom of David. "Hosanna!!!" It means "save us." Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." The one who can establish peace and justice. The one who can stand up to the Romans. The crowd cut leafy branches from the fields and put down their coats to prepare the way for Jesus on that Palm Sunday. "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!" The crowd welcomed a king that day. The crowd did not join with the neighbors at Nazareth and ask "Where did he get all this?" The crowd did not join John the Baptist and ask "Are you he who is to come or do we look for another." They were clear. "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David." And they welcomed Jesus as their King.

Did Jesus see himself as messiah? Did Jesus see himself as the king who would restore the Kingdom of David? He certainly did not enter Jerusalem like Jehu had – on a horse – as symbol of power and war. Instead, Jesus entered on a donkey, a symbol of peace. There is a lot of tension between the person the crowd wanted to welcome that day and the symbol of peace used by Jesus.

However we interpret that scene, we are on solid ground when we take this story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem – as the early church took it – a meaningful symbol of Jesus as King. At stake is the question – What sort of Kingdom? Following Jesus was to follow with acts of love as fundamental to the Christian life. The Kingdom that Jesus brought was a kingdom where God rules in the hearts and minds of followers. It is not a political kingdom, it is not a kingdom based on military might, it is not a kingdom based on the power of privilege of the rich. It is a kingdom that is inclusive. All the children on this earth belong to God.

Truth of Jesus – the truth of Christianity is that it is not spun out of brains of theologians. Truth is in the events in our lives in contemporary history. That is where we encounter God's presence among us.

Just look for a moment at the world in which we live. We are in the grip of financial chaos. There is war in much of our world. There is hunger, disease, poverty that saps the energy of us. I don't know about you, but thinking of the world in which we live, it was helpful to me for us to take our palm branches and join that first

# PILGRIM C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

Palm Sunday crowd “Hosanna!!!” Save us! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We also join in their hope for salvation.

There is a part of the text today that we tend to rush by. We want to wave the palms. We want to express our hope. We want God in our midst to lead us to a new day. But seven of our eleven verses in the text for today speak to us of “preparing the way.” Seven of the verses are about the very ordinary task of securing an animal for Jesus to ride that day. Palm Sunday is about waving branches, putting down our coats, and promising our allegiance to the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Palm Sunday also reminds us to prepare the way of the Lord.

The boy was constantly in trouble on the school bus. He was always picking a fight and was out of control. A girl on the bus decided she would be a friend to him. She asked him to sit with her. Then she began to help him with his homework for the day. When she realized he never ate breakfast, she started bringing him a biscuit with some jelly for breakfast. The boy calmed down and began to make much progress. One day the girl did not ride the bus to school. When she got to school, she was told that the boy was in the principal’s office – in trouble. She went to see the principal and explained to him that it was all her fault. If she had been on the bus that day, the boy would not be in trouble. The principal thanked her for her work with the boy. How do you see that? I say she was preparing the way of the Lord.

When Jim Wiswall died, Nancy and others took food and went to help with the family. I say they were preparing the way of the Lord. When we involve our children of the church in fixing a meal for the men at the homeless shelter, I say we are preparing the way of the Lord. When we tutor children or help with a work day at Youth Serve, when we spend the day working with Hands On Birmingham, I say we are preparing the way of the Lord. When we refuse to listen to someone condemning the gay and lesbian community, we are preparing the way of the Lord. When we bring our food for the Greater Birmingham Food Pantry, we are preparing the way of the Lord.

It is good to have ordination services. It is good to celebrate big events in our lives and in society. But basically, preparing the way of the lord is a lot like finding a donkey for Jesus to ride on Palm Sunday.

Discipleship is not by our thought alone – but must be made by action. Our following Jesus, is not a question of “Are You The One?” The proper word for preparing the way of the lord is always the same - “Hosanna. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.” Let us offer our name and our work to those who today wave the palm branches, who spread their coats on the road and shout – “Hosanna!” Save Us. And in our speaking and our work, we will prepare the way of the Lord.