

NOTES ON MATTHEW 21: 1-11 - PALM SUNDAY.

I thought about a theme for today's sermon besides the obvious, and what I came up with was OBEDIENCE, OBEDIENCE and OBEDIENCE.

1. OBEDIENCE of the disciples leading to the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy.

When the early disciples started their education under the great Teacher, Jesus, they were very green. But after three years during which they had observed him change water to wine, feed thousands with five loaves and two fishes, command Peter to take a coin from a fish's mouth, with which to pay temple tax, they were almost ready to obey any instruction from him.

So, in Matthew 21: 2 and 3, when he instructed them to go to the village ahead of them, find and bring a donkey tied up, and if anyone says anything to you, tell the owner that the Lord needs it. "The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them." They went, found the colt and brought it to Jesus. No questions asked.

Oh, I wish this could be said of you and me. What is it you have read in the word of God, or heard preached or taught about our Lord Jesus that you have been called to do? When Jesus speaks to us, THE RESPONSE should be OBEDIENCE!

This event preceding the final week of Christ's earthly ministry is reported by all the four gospels to show us that God wants us to pay particular attention to it. If you consider the birth of Jesus Christ, for example, it was reported by only Matthew and Luke, but this and other events in the passion week, matter a lot to the earthly mission of Jesus Christ, so much so that each of the gospel writers devotes more than a third of their writings to the last week of Jesus ministry.

2. OBEDIENCE of THE SON OF MAN leading to his declaration as King and Messiah

Jesus proposed to ride into Jerusalem in a way that would be an unmistakable claim to be the Messiah, God's anointed king. He could have decided to ride on a stallion, and not on a lowly donkey after all, he is a King, but that would be contrary to God's intention as prophesied by Prophet Zechariah. The events of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem were taking place "as it is written". He was going the way the Scriptures have predicted of him.

In the past, he would warn people not to announce his miracles and disclose his identity. This time, things were different. It was a deliberate claim to be king, a deliberate fulfilling of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. spoken over 500 years before this incident. And the people knew it. Zechariah said: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

That Sunday was also the day the Jews would pick the lamb to be used as their Passover lamb, and what a fitting procession as **the Lamb of God rode on a donkey into Jerusalem. He was riding to his death but as Lamb of God, his obedience meant, No turning back.**

By clearly identifying Jesus as the Son of David, that is, the Messiah, the crowd was repeating the word "Hosanna," a one-word prayer that means "O Lord, save now!" **It was a petition for immediate deliverance from oppression. For them, the Messiah has come to raise up an army, and with the help of God, Rome would be sent running with their pagan tails between their legs.**

As Jesus began to speak, which was what he did for most of the following days, the people

were utterly disappointed: " The kingdom that is coming is the kingdom of God, where sinful humanity is reconciled to a holy God." Hence Jesus would not be deterred on his way to Calvary.

3. OBEDIENCE of the little donkey leading to the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem

This little donkey was part of the great plan of redemption that God had for all of Creation. The full cooperation of the donkey cannot be glossed over, being an untamed animal. Jesus used that donkey to move toward Calvary and to his ultimate sacrifice. **He rode on that donkey to take one more step toward saving the world.** Can you be that donkey? **And the line that starts this whole chain of events in motion is my favourite from the passage: "The Lord Needs It..."**

What if that was said of you? What if you heard those words: "The Lord Needs You?" What would you say in response? Would you believe it and say "Yes Lord" or "No, Lord"? Will you say, "I am too... old, young, poor, tired, sinful, busy, overwhelmed..." or "Why would God want to use someone like me?"

We can learn a few lessons from Christ's interaction with The Donkey:

1. "We must be accessible" and willing to be loosed.

Some people are tied up in sin, self-righteousness, arrogance, guilt or hurt of the past, unforgiveness etc... Whatever you're tied up in, Jesus can set you free as you make yourself available to his mercy and grace.

2. The donkey was accommodating and cooperative. Verses 6 and 7. The Donkey, acted against its nature—it can be stubborn, especially one that has never been ridden before! (Luke 19:30) Instead of bucking Jesus, it cooperated with him. Instead of trotting clumsily, it pranced like a Clydesdale...

Conclusion.

A few days after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a colt, was His shameful exit from Calvary on a cross. The people of Jerusalem saw Jesus as an earthly king who was expected to dethrone the oppressive Roman Empire, but their vision of him was limited by their own finite and worldly needs. Who is Jesus to you? He came to defeat Sin and Satan in our lives, but he still cares for our daily needs.

When we wave our palms and boldly cry out, "Hosanna," do we dare imagine what we really want God to save us from? Save me from sin and my failures. Save me from anger. Save me from ill health. Save me from depression. Save me from debt. Save me from the strife in my family... Save me from bitterness and the sin of unforgiveness. Save me from arrogance. Save me from loneliness. Save me...

In viewing Palm Sunday from that angle, we can begin to see the potential for some real depth in this celebration, for embedded in our quaint pageantry is an appeal to God that bubbles, almost beyond our control, to the surface. "Hosanna." "Save us."