# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Jesus Enters Jerusalem”**

**John 12:12-19**

**April 14, 2019**

Several generations before Jesus was born, there was a Jewish man named Judah Maccabeus living in Israel. During his time the Syrian military occupied the city of Jerusalem. Judah gathered an army of Jewish men who fought against and defeated the Syrians. In 163BC he entered Jerusalem riding a massive stallion, and the people shouted and waved palm branches and cheered, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Palm branches were abundant in Israel, and they were used as a symbol of Jewish nationalism. We could compare them to waving American flags during nationalistic celebrations in our country.

Judah Maccabeus was their conquering hero, and many thought he was the Jewish Messiah spoken of by prophets long ago. When he and his men entered the city, they cleaned out the false gods of the Syrians from the temple, burned incense and offered sacrifices to God, and lit a huge menorah that burned for eight days. To this day our Jewish friends celebrate eight days of the Festival of Lights, or Hanukkah, to celebrate this victory. However, not long after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Judah was killed in battle.

Now, about two hundred years after Judah Maccabeus, Jesus enters Jerusalem, and the crowd welcomes him in much the same way. Judah clearly wasn’t their Messiah for, while he had won a great victory, Israel was soon occupied once more, this time by the Romans. Perhaps Jesus would do better. I invite you to turn with me to John 12:12-19

The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted, “Praise God!Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!”Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said: “Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey’s colt.”His disciples didn’t understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him. Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and they were telling others about it. That was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign. Then the Pharisees said to each other, “There’s nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him!”

The stories of the entries into Jerusalem of Judah Maccabeus and Jesus are similar except for one important detail. When Judah entered the city, he was mounted on a war horse signifying conquest and victory in battle. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a young donkey, signifying peace and life. Jesus’ manner of entry fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy, part of which is quoted in our text by John. Follow along as I read for you the fuller prophecy from Zechariah 9:9-10

Rejoice, O people of Zion!Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey - riding on a donkey’s colt. I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy all the weapons used in battle, and your king will bring peace to the nations.

This humble king is not a man of chariots and war horses, swords and bows, but one who will bring peace to all nations. His gift is a gift of life, not conquest. This, of course, is consistent with what Jesus has been proclaiming throughout his earthly ministry. About a year before this Jesus was teaching a large crowd on a Galilean hillside. It was getting late in the day and the people were hungry, so Jesus instructed his disciples to feed them. But the only food on hand was the lunch of a little boy. Jesus blessed that small amount of food and everyone ate as much as they could – and there were twelve baskets of bread left over. The crowd was so taken by this miracle and so excited about this miracle worker that they wanted to make him their king right then and there. But Jesus refused, leaving them and going into the hills by himself.

That crowd, like the crowd in today’s passage, wanted an earthly king, a king who would not only sit upon the throne of David but who would lead them in battle against the hated Romans. He was everything you could hope for in a military leader. He was capable of feeding thousands of soldiers, just like he’d fed the five thousand. If his soldiers were wounded in battle he would be able to heal them, for he had healed large numbers of people throughout his ministry. Even when his soldiers were killed, he could raise them from the dead as he had done for Lazarus just a couple of weeks before. What army on earth could stand against such a king? Yes, Jesus could have done all of that and much more, but that is not why he came.

Jesus came to offer peace with God and eternal life to all who believe in him. He came to defeat the greatest enemy of humankind which is sin, and its consequence which is eternal death. For that to happen, he had to do more than enter Jerusalem while receiving the adulation of the crowd. He had to go to the cross by which sin is forgiven, and he had to die in order to take our punishment for our sin upon himself. But he did not remain dead. On Easter Sunday the Father raised Jesus from the dead, and we too will be raised with him into the everlasting presence of God.

God the Father has a plan for our world and his plan is being carried out through his Son, Jesus. This world in which we live is not out of control, much as it may feel that way to us. God is not surprised by what is taking place in our society. He is not pleased, but he has not been caught off guard. The Bible is clear that there is coming a day when Jesus will return and this time he will not come as a humble servant but will return as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and he will make right all that is wrong.

This also means that things are not out of control in our lives. God has a plan for you and for me. There are times when I look at what is going on in my life and I wonder what God is up to. I wish Jesus would ride in on a white stallion and make everything better for me, feeding me, healing me, and ridding me of the problems and struggles that are my enemies. When he doesn’t, I wonder why. But then I consider his Word, like the promise from our passage today which encourages us not to be afraid for our King is with us.

I often don’t understand exactly what that means and how God is bringing it about, but then neither did the disciples understand the meaning of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. And I am comforted by the truth that the fact that, when I don’t understand what is going on in my life, it does not mean that God is not at work. He has promised that he will lead everyone who believes in him to that which is ultimately good. God knows what he is doing and while we may not always understand him, we can always trust him. Jesus trusted his heavenly Father, laying down his life in the confidence that the Father would restore it. As did Jesus, you and I can with confidence entrust our lives to him.