

## CBWC Palm Sunday Sermon 2021 – Peter Anderson

So, it's Palm Sunday once again and the beginning of what many Christians call Holy Week. This is a part of the church year when we remember, reflect on, and celebrate the final days leading up to and through the death and resurrection of Jesus. In particular, on this Sunday, Palm Sunday, we focus in on the event that really jump-started Jesus' journey to the cross... His three-kilometer ride on the back of a young donkey, from Bethany into the holy city of Jerusalem. Here's the account of this event from Luke 19:29-38

“As [Jesus] approached Bethpage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

34 They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. (in the other gospel accounts it also says that people waved palm branches)

37 When [Jesus] came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

(the other gospel accounts also note that people are shouting “Hosanna” which means “Save us”)

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

When reading these verses my thoughts immediately turn to Palm Sundays past and I can see images of kids walking down the centre aisle of the church waving palm branches made of construction paper and shouting “Hosanna”. And of course, there is always that handful of kids for whom shouting in church is the highlight of their life and thus they do their best to blow the roof off. This joy, this exuberance...this expectation of something exciting is characteristic, I think, of the way we all generally view Palm Sunday.

We like to picture ourselves as a part of that crowd celebrating Jesus, laying down our coats at his feet, waving palm branches, singing His praises. Well at least I do. This is a good image, but there are quite a few other people involved in this scene. Today we're going to take a closer look at everyone involved, exploring their relationship with Jesus (or lack thereof) and then Jesus is going to tell us a Palm Sunday Parable to help us better understand His hope for us on our own journey.

Let's begin with the crowd gathered. Word had been spreading rapidly about Jesus, the prophet and teacher from Nazareth, who had performed great signs and wonders. The most miraculous of these being just days before when Jesus brought a man named Lazarus back from the dead. The Jewish people of Jesus' day found themselves under Roman rule and were expectantly awaiting a savior to defeat Rome and set them free. It's easily understandable that they would expect that someone who has the power to raise the dead could also deliver them from Roman authority. Thus, as Jesus approaches Jerusalem surrounded by his disciples and followers who are shouting "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" the whole thing goes "viral" in a sense. The crowd is caught up in the moment and similarly to the way a red-carpet functions in our society, they create a pathway of honor made up of the coats. The palm branches they waved held much symbolism for the Jewish people and were representative of an expectation that in the end times they would once again experience close communion with God. This is a beautiful scene, but unfortunately, it seems that this is an easily swayed bunch as you'll remember that it would be just a few days later when "the crowd" would be yelling "crucify him", "crucify him".

The next group of people present for Jesus' "Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem is the Pharisees, a specific group of Jewish religious leaders. Throughout the 3 or so years of Jesus' public ministry, he had no shortage of run ins with the Pharisees and other religious leaders. In fact, in most cases, Jesus was particularly critical of those who proclaimed to know God's will and plan for His people. And...with a few notable exceptions, most of the Jewish religious leaders were not supportive of Jesus (to put it mildly). And therefore, it should come as no surprise that when Jesus' disciples are saying of Him "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" the Pharisees are not happy. They don't believe Jesus is a prophet and they certainly don't believe he is the king of Israel. It's interesting that they approach Jesus and ask him to tell his disciples to stop saying these things. Jesus response that the "rocks will cry out" if the disciples don't is His way of saying, that inanimate objects have a better idea of what's going on here than the Pharisees do. God's plan of salvation was right in front of them and they just couldn't see it.

We come now to the final group of people in this story and that's the disciples and followers of Jesus who were traveling along with him down the road. They had learned from Jesus, followed Jesus, even worshiped Jesus. They had also witnessed the raising of Lazarus and it seemed as though everything was building towards an exciting climax in Jerusalem. Jesus is the promised one who will make things right by ushering in the kingdom of God. They were ready to stand by Jesus and fight with him and if necessary, even die with Him. But it was clear to Jesus that they, along with everyone else, didn't fully grasp what was going on and what was going to come. In order to help make things more clear, Jesus did what He so often did, He told a story. This story is a powerful one and as you'll soon see features all of the people Jesus encountered during his "triumphal entry" and as you'll also see...it features you and it features me.

This story is known as The Parable of the 10 Minas and also the parable of the 10 Servants. I'll be reading from Luke 19:11-27 from the New Living Translation.

11 The crowd was listening to everything Jesus said. And because he was nearing Jerusalem, he told them a story to correct the impression that the Kingdom of God would begin right away.

Before we get to hearing the parable, it is absolutely essential to understand why Jesus is telling this story. It's to correct the impression that the kingdom of God would begin right away. Jesus knew the road that lay ahead for Him and that His death and resurrection would set things right between God and humanity. But He also knew that there would be a period of waiting until God's kingdom (His kingdom) was fully realized. Jesus knew that following and trusting in Him during this in-between time was going to be difficult and He wanted people to be prepared for what lay ahead. This in-between time is right now and thus this story is for us just like it was for those that heard it 2,000 years ago.

The Parable of the 10 Minas (and for clarity sake, a "mina" is an amount of money worth about 1/3 of the average working person's yearly salary)

12 Jesus said, "A nobleman was called away to a distant empire to be crowned king and then return. 13 Before he left, he called together ten of his servants and divided among them ten minas, saying, 'Invest this for me while I am gone.' 14 But his people hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We do not want him to be our king.'

15 "After he was crowned king, he returned and called in the servants to whom he had given the money. He wanted to find out what their profits were. 16 The first servant reported, 'Master, I invested your money and made ten times the original amount!'

17 "'Well done!' the king exclaimed. 'You are a good servant. You have been faithful with the little I entrusted to you, so you will be governor of ten cities as your reward.'

18 "The next servant reported, 'Master, I invested your money and made five times the original amount.'

19 "'Well done!' the king said. 'You will be governor over five cities.'

20 "But the third servant brought back only the original amount of money and said, 'Master, I hid your money and kept it safe. 21 I was afraid because you are a hard man to deal with, taking what isn't yours and harvesting crops you didn't plant.'

22 "'You wicked servant!' the king roared. 'Your own words condemn you. If you knew that I'm a hard man who takes what isn't mine and harvests crops I didn't plant, 23 why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.'

24 "Then, turning to the others standing nearby, the king ordered, 'Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one who has ten pounds.'

25 "'But, master,' they said, 'he already has ten pounds!'

26 "'Yes,' the king replied, 'and to those who use well what they are given, even more will be given. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. 27 And as for these enemies of mine who didn't want me to be their king—bring them in and execute them right here in front of me.'"

You might be thinking, "Wow! Thanks Peter for sharing that uplifting Palm Sunday story. I was perfectly content thinking about little kids waving the construction paper palm branches."

It's true, at first read this story does seem a little bit shocking and maybe even depressing, but I promise that as we look at it closer, you'll see that it's filled with good news.

In this parable Jesus himself is the nobleman who goes away to be made king. This foreshadows Jesus' promise that He will return one day and rule over a perfect kingdom that has no end.

Before leaving the nobleman calls 10 of his servants and gives them each one mina with the instructions that they should invest it while he is away or as another translation puts it, they should "put the money to work". Then the nobleman departs.

When He returns, now the king, he calls in each of the servants and asks them to give account for what they've done with what they were given. We are only told about three of the 10 servants but in these three we see all the different possibilities for how someone might respond to the king's direction.

The first servant presents the king with 10 times the original amount and is rewarded with 10 cities to govern. The second presents 5 times the original amount and is rewarded with 5 cities to govern. We'll come back to these two servants in just a bit.

Next, we have the third servant the king's interaction with him or her makes up the majority of Jesus' story. This servant has done nothing with what was given and has simply presented the original mina back to the nobleman. Why?

Well, the servant says that it's because the king is a hard man to deal with and the servant was afraid. What's interesting here is that it's clear this servant does not really know the king, because the king's reaction to the first two servants is incredibly gracious and generous. The king praises the first two servants, allows them to keep what they've earned and then rewards them with infinitely more responsibilities: governing cities. The king's response to the third servant helps us to understand what's going on here even further.

"'You wicked servant!' the king roared. 'Your own words condemn you. If you knew that I'm a hard man who takes what isn't mine and harvests crops I didn't plant, why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.'

This is not the king's confession that he is as the third servant thought rather a declaration that the third servant's actions don't line up with what he declared he believed about the nobleman. If the third servant had really believed these things about the king, then he would have at least done something with what he was given out of fear. In reality, the third servant does nothing with the Mina because he or she has no trust or meaningful relationship with the king. The third servant couldn't be bothered with the work the king gave to do.

The king's response is to take the mina from the wicked servant and give it to the one who has 10. The crowd protests this response stating that the one with 10 already has enough. Jesus is making a strong and clear point here: faithfulness will be rewarded. But it must not be missed that the additional mina given to the faithful servant is still to be used for the benefit of the king.

This leaves us with the final element of Jesus' story. The king orders that all of those people who didn't want Him to be king, be put to death.

As we reflect on this element of the story and the story as a whole, we must remember why Jesus is telling this parable. He wants everyone to understand that the kingdom of God is "here but not yet". His death and resurrection result in Him becoming the king of kings, but at the same time his kingdom has not yet fully come. As I mentioned before, it's this in-between time that we find ourselves in.

Jesus' Palm Sunday parable presents us with both a warning and as I promised earlier some really good news. First the warning.

The warning is this: everyone is accountable to Jesus in one way or another. Like the crowd who did not want to see the nobleman become king, those who reject Jesus are responsible for not recognizing who he was and is. And in the end, people who want nothing to do with Jesus are going to get their wish. There will be a judgement and it will be final.

The second part of the warning is what we learn from the third servant: mere association with the community of faith counts for nothing; what counts is a personal relationship with Jesus. The third servant was associated with the noblemen, but it was proven over time that there was no real relationship with the king.

This is an important and sobering reminder for anyone who is coasting along through life, just kind of indifferent about Jesus. Jesus, the king of kings, doesn't give us that option. He asks everyone who is associated with him to work together with him for the betterment of the world. To use what he's given them well. And that brings us to the good news.

The parable shows Jesus to be incredibly generous. Just like each servant was given an amount of money to steward, to grow, to take care of so are we given gifts and talents and finances to use for our king Jesus. Jesus is inviting you and me to work along side of him in spreading the good news that He is king. He is inviting you and me to thrive in this world by creatively using what we've been given for His glory.

Jesus' promise is this: for all who walk with him faithfully on the journey through this world, there is nothing to fear. Faithfulness is going to be rewarded in ways that go beyond our comprehension. For those who are faithful the judgment is a time of affirmation.

Can't you just picture Jesus, our king, saying to you, "Well done, my good servant! I've got big plans for you."

On this Palm Sunday it's important to remember that we are all accountable to God for the way in which we journey through his world. On his ride on the back of a humble donkey into Jerusalem there were those who made it clear they did not believe nor want him to be king. There were those who were associated with Jesus in some way, but it would become clear they didn't really ever know or trust or put their faith in Him. And there were those who would use the gifts that Jesus had given them to serve their king and would be greatly rewarded for their faithfulness.

Let's pause for just a moment and I want you to picture that Palm Sunday scene and now put yourself in it. Take a moment now to consider, where do you fit?

I don't know where you saw yourself in that story. Whether you were someone who was angrily yelling for people to quiet about Jesus, whether you were someone who was not sure about Jesus and just going along and church life is new to you and you're not sure about all of this or maybe your someone who's followed Jesus for a long time, and you've realized that you're not fully using what God has given you for His glory.

Each of us has been given what we need to have a real, authentic, meaningful, life changing relationship with Jesus. Each of us has also been given gifts, talents and resources that we are asked to make good use of to the glory of God and the betterment of our world.

May we be people who strive everyday be good and faithful servants in eager expectation of the return of our king. Let' pray.

*Lord Jesus, our Savior, our king. You've entrusted us with so much. In this in-between time, as we wait for your return, you have good work for us to do in this world on your behalf. We are your hands and feet. You've given us enough. Each of the servants received the same amount. You've given each of us opportunities, gifts, talents, finances, resources, all of that. Give us the wisdom to know how to use them and the courage to use what we've been given for your glory. That upon your return we would hear you say, "Well done good and faithful servant". And we would share in the beauty of your kingdom that will never ever end. Amen.*