

Palm Sunday
April 5, 2020

Pastor Lew Upchurch
Matthew 21:1-11

“Wrong Answer”

If you're like me, you've had a few embarrassing moments in your life. One that I'll never forget happened when I was home from college one weekend. I can't remember what special day in the church it was, but I do remember going to Sunday service. My family had already gotten there and of course I showed up a little late. The church was crowded. So instead of making a scene, I made my way up to the balcony. It too was a little tight, but I found a seat. Well, almost as soon as I sat down, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around and definitely noticed the familiar face. “Hey Lew, good to see you,” the distinguished looking man said. “Hey there Mr. Hendricks, I replied...” “good to see you.” Well guess what? It turns out this man wasn't Mr. Hendricks at all. He was my father's cousin, Larry. And don't think I didn't hear about this when church was over. Because sometime between that moment and the end of church, cousin Larry made sure my dad knew that I called him by the wrong name.

Now in my defense cousin Larry and Mr. Hendricks did look alike. But in that moment I didn't see him for who he really was—a relative. I only saw a man who looked like a family friend. In other words by calling him by the wrong name, I gave the wrong answer.

Now, I tell you this because today we are celebrating Palm Sunday. It's the day, of course, where Jesus rides into Jerusalem to begin the last week of his life. Jerusalem is packed with those who have come to celebrate the Passover. Many of those in the city come out to join the crowds that are already showering Jesus with praise. People are waving palm branches. And the crowds, as the text says, that went before him and that followed him were were shouting, “Hosanna to Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And when he entered Jerusalem, with whole city was stirred up, saying “Who is this?” And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Well guess what? Wrong answer! Of course the crowd, at first, seem to get it right. “Son of David,” they call him, which is another way of saying King. “Blessed is this King who comes in the name of the Lord.” But we have to

ask ourselves if they really know what they are saying. Because after he had entered into Jerusalem, the whole city was unsettled, to say the least. “Who is this man,” they ask? The crowd had a chance right there to say what I’m sure many of them knew just from listening to Jesus over the past couple of years, including the disciples. But what do they say? “This guy? He’s is the prophet from Nazareth.” Now if we go back to Matthew 16, we get a different answer from none other than Peter himself. Jesus asks, “Who do people say that I am?” Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to the disciples. Who do you say that I am?” Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. So I think it’s safe to say that Peter, or at least some of the disciples when asked, “who is this,” could have boldly answered, “He’s the promised one who will die and save people from their sins.” **And maybe they did.** But the loudest voices were the ones that were heard. “This is the prophet.”

Now, you might be thinking, “who cares?” The people obviously saw Jesus as a big deal. They were waiving palm branches and shouting Hosanna. Plus, what’s wrong with calling Jesus a prophet? Well, nothing actually. It’s true. But there is so much more to it, isn’t there? I mean this man cruising into Jerusalem on a donkey isn’t just some smart and popular guy from Nazareth who can do some really cool and miraculous things in the name of God. He isn’t some charismatic leader coming to Jerusalem promising “real change.” No, this is the promised Son entering into Jerusalem in order to bring his Father’s plan of redemption to completion. He would ultimately be recognized by many as King all right—not on a throne, though. But on a cross.

One thing we can never forget in all of this is that many of those same folks who were waving palm branches ,and telling people that this is the prophet Jesus, are going to desert him just a few days later. In fact many of them will change teams and join the ones crying out for his crucifixion. And even if they didn’t do that, a lot of them probably chose to remain silent. Maybe they concluded that they really didn’t know who this Jesus was.

So what about you? If someone asked you, “who is this,” concerning Jesus, what would you say? I ask you to really think about this question because all of us, I think, can fall into this pattern much like the crowd following him into Jerusalem that day. We can easily put Jesus into the

“Heroes of the Faith” category right up there with Abraham, Moses, David, and all the prophets, who point us to God. Or we can say he’s the model of perfect morality that we should tried to follow or a great teacher or preacher. And technically we wouldn’t be wrong. **But what is wrong is when our answers take for granted the significance of God coming into his creation to save it.** Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, is not an invisible friend who becomes whatever we want him to be in our lives. He’s not our life coach who helps us run our businesses, or gives us success when we fail. Yes, Jesus cares deeply for each and every one of us and is active in all of lives—many times in ways we will never even know. But Jesus isn’t just a part of Christianity who is there when we need him. Jesus is the very center; the very core of the Christian faith.

And this becomes extremely clear when we really look at this account of Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and the subsequent chapters that follow. Because something stands out that we can’t miss. Jesus will do what God sent him to do regardless of what answer people gave as to who he is. He would enter the city. He would die. He would rise from the dead. And all of it was to save people from their sins.

My friends, all of us, especially during this pandemic want a glimmer of hope, don’t we? Days are running together. The routine at home is getting old. Finances for many are on unstable ground. Kids are not with their friends. These are challenging times, for sure. And if Jesus has mainly been this great prophet in our lives whom we have found personally helpful and meaningful as we encounter life’s challenges, we might be a little disappointed.

So I want to proclaim to you some good news today. Jesus is so much more than a prophet who points to the things of God. Jesus is God. He who was crucified for our sins and raised to new life. He makes all things new, which includes you, me, and all with faith in him. He is the Savior today and forever. Now that’s the **right** answer. And thank God for it. Amen.