

2018 NL4 WK29 John 12:12-19
18-03-25 Palm Sunday

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior,
Jesus Christ.....Amen.....

It has been fun for me having John as our gospel reading so far this year. This is our 4th year with the Narrative Lectionary (chosen lessons for the day) and we've done Matthew, Mark, Luke (MML), so we are in John. One year per gospel. And we have never had a time with such a concentration on John.

Plus..... I've never used John's version of the Palm Sunday/Triumphal entry story. Because it's always from MML and let's be honest, it isn't as detailed in John.

But it is still really important for the details that it DOES include. For example, John is the only gospel writer who mentions that the branches were PALM branches. Only one writer calls them that, and yet we have named the day "Palm" Sunday..... Probably because "leafy branches and garments Sunday" doesn't have quite the same ring to it.

But this story that we may think we know so well is told differently by the 4 writers.

MML have garments on the donkey and on the road; MM have leafy branches.

Jesus finds his own donkey in John. While the others....

All of them quote Psalm 118 – *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*

Luke and John have the crowds calling him King.

Luke's crowd never says "hosanna";

in Luke the crowds quote the angels, "*Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*"

For John, this is Jesus' 3rd trip to Jerusalem..... For MML it is Jesus' first time.

We have noted all along that John's gospel is very different than the other three, even though the main character is the same. Instead of giving a history of Jesus, John has composed a story with Jesus living the life of a devout Jew coming and going to Jerusalem and performing wondrous signs along the way.

The last of the signs was raising his friend Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, were good friends of Jesus who lived in the village of Bethany just around the corner of the Mount of Olives.

Scripture says that it was a Sabbath journey's walk from Jerusalem which means it was close enough that people from the city could get there.

And John says that there was a "*great crowd*" from Jerusalem that traveled to Bethany the night before the parade.... and among those in the great crowd were also religious officials from the whole Jewish world. Many of them were starting to believe in Jesus and wanted to see Lazarus, too. So the chief priests, who had already decided that Jesus had to die, also said that they would have to put Lazarus to death.

We don't hear another word about Lazarus. There is no "flight of Lazarus" story in the Bible, but there are traditions: According to [Eastern Orthodox Church](#) tradition, sometime after the [Resurrection of Christ](#), Lazarus was forced to flee [Judea](#) because of rumoured [sic] plots on his life and came to [Cyprus](#). There he was appointed by [Paul](#) and [Barnabas](#) as the first [bishop](#) of Kition (present-day [Larnaka](#)). He lived there for thirty more years,^[23] and on his death was buried there for the second and last time..... The Roman Catholic Church has Lazarus as a Bishop in France after a harrowing journey on the sea. (wikipedia)

So now the chief priests are after two people who must die for the good of the nation, and even more so after Jesus' impromptu parade into Jerusalem.

He came out of Lazarus' house around the corner and down the Mount of Olives.

The crowd was still with him and they found palm branches oddly enough on a mountain full of olive trees, but they began waving those branches.

Palms in the Mediterranean world signified military might and honor and most of all victory. By waving those branches, the crowd was making a statement:

here is our king....., our hero....., our champion..... (Olive branches would be a completely different message of peace and calm!)

The wonder-worker and military-hopeful who even raised someone from the dead. Resurrection is the final straw.....; resurrection is the offense that signs Jesus' death warrant; and resurrection will be Jesus' final word.

The irony here is that it is "new life" that brings the sentence of death, and death being the only way that Jesus can usher in a new life for us all.....

But in our story today, it is the Pharisees who have the last word. After they witness the crowds following after Jesus they "said to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.'"

In John's writing, he uses the short phrase, "the world," 66x. (Only 16x in all of MML) John establishes from the first chapter that "the world" is not like God....., and THAT's why God came in Jesus.

"The light came into the world, but the world did not know him (1:9-10)....

Behold! the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29).....

For God so loved the world.... (3:16)"

The last time Jesus speaks of *the world* is when Pilate is questioning him (18:37) and Jesus says that he came into the world to testify to the truth..... to which his followers belong. And Pilate promptly shows that he is the opposite of Jesus' followers by asking, "What is truth?"

God came into the world.... in Jesus.... because the dark....., unknowing....., sinful....., and unloved..... world needed him to.

God's own creation needed him to come....., so he did.

God knew what the world was like....., and God came anyway.

God knows what your life is like,

the good....., the bad, the troublesome....., the lonely,

the sinful....., the shameful..... so God has come in Jesus for you.

Not to ask you to try harder....., but to say, "You are forgiven, I have taken away your sin. You no longer belong to the world, you belong to me."

Our God....., the one who brings life out of death is your God.

But the world doesn't like it....., and the world will try to get you..... The crowd that was so enamored with Jesus..... and causes the chief priests to want to get him....., while they had been interested in following him and had been waving those nationalistic/militaristic palms in his favor....., is never mentioned again in John's story..... Instead we next hear from the Jews, the religious leaders and their plot to kill Jesus.

This week the cries of "Hosanna!" – which means "save us!" – will turn to "Crucify!" The bewildered crowds are left with their dashed hopes of a military Messiah, and the Chief Priests, while they get what they want.... They don't get what they deserve."

And by the end of all of this..... God shows you, and Jesus tells you that he loves you. See you on Thursday as our story continues..... in the upper room.