Though the way is long and steep, follow Jesus.

*Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.”*

 John 11:16

We always tend to think of the apostle Thomas as “doubting Thomas”, because he is the one who was not present with the other apostles when Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection. When the others told Thomas, he refused to believe it. His one act of disbelief has forever given him this dubious nickname.

But Thomas did come to believe when Jesus appeared to the apostles a second time. And Thomas went so far as to worship Him. He said to Jesus, “*My Lord and my God!*” He recognized Jesus’ humanity and His deity.

But let’s not miss this account in the Gospel according to John. The disciples couldn’t imagine why Jesus wanted to go to Jerusalem where He faced certain death at the hands of the religious leaders. Yet that’s where Jesus wanted to go. Jesus understood that He had to go there in order to bring about the salvation of mankind.

Thomas did not understand this. But, in his loyalty and faithfulness to his Teacher, he was willing to stick with Him even if he had to die. Yes, the apostles all fled at the time of Jesus’ arrest; this had to be to fulfill the Scriptures that Jesus would be alone and none of those given Him would be lost. Yet at this moment, Thomas demonstrated his devotion and allegiance to Christ.

May we be willing to do the same. There are many throughout the world that daily face the prospect of death for following Jesus. While we don’t yet face that threat in America, we still face persecution. We are called to follow Jesus no matter what; we must persevere. The Holy Spirit is the One who gives strength. Depend on Him.

In Christ’s love

John

 4-2-23

Luke 19:28-44

The last several weeks, we have been considering some of what took place in the upper room during the Last Supper. Today we will back up in time about a week to consider what Luke tells us about Jesus coming into Jerusalem. This is called Palm Sunday or Jesus’ triumphal entry.

This is an account well known to all of us. The name Palm Sunday comes from the people laying Palm branches, along with their cloaks, on the ground for the donkey Jesus was riding on to walk on. It is called the triumphal entry because Jesus was entering Jerusalem as a King. In a time of peace, a king would ride a donkey; in a time of war, the king would ride a horse. Jesus was offering peace. Later, in Revelation 19:11, when Jesus comes back to earth for the second time, we see that He will be riding a horse.

The Mount of Olives is on the east side of Jerusalem and the road leading down to the city is quite steep. It leads down to the vicinity of the Garden of Gethsemane and to the Kidron Valley. It leads to what is known as the East Gate. The Bible indicates that Jesus will return to Jerusalem this same way, but much more dramatically. Frist will be the battle of Armageddon at Megiddo, where Jesus will slay all the enemies of Jerusalem by simply speaking (Rev 19:21). Then, according to Zechariah 14:4, He will stand on the Mount of Olives which will then spilt from east to west, forming a valley.

This will be the return the Jews were looking for, where the Messiah will establish His Kingdom and all the enemies of God and His people will be subdued. Unfortunately, while the Bible is clear that the Messiah will come twice, once in humility and once in glory, the Jews missed the Messiah’s coming to bring peace. Jesus made it plain by His miracles and His teaching, and by coming into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, that He was the Messiah and that He was coming to bring peace.

What we have to be sure that we understand is that Jesus succeeded in bringing peace; it just wasn’t the peace people were expecting. Jesus brought about the possibility of having peace with God. Because of our sin, all of us are enemies of God. If we are willing to believe in Jesus as our Saviour; understanding that His work on the cross will atone for our sins; then we will be at peace with God, adopted by Him as sons and daughters, heirs of all the good things He has for us.

Jesus’ deity is demonstrated in the power of His words, even when they are transmitted through other men. His mere statement, “*The Lord has need of it*”, was enough to cause the owners of the donkey to release it into the hands of strangers. His deity is also demonstrated by having an animal upon which no one had ever ridden, calmly carry Him down the steep hill, even with all the shouting and commotion going on around them. Jesus, the God-man, has demonstrated His power over creation throughout His ministry on earth. The creation that was made through Him; the Word of God.

The people were very excited when Jesus entered Jerusalem this way. Although their understanding was misdirected, they did have some understanding. The phrase they were shouting, “*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord*”, comes from Psalm 118:26; and this Psalm is definitely understood to be about the Messiah. They were proclaiming Jesus to be King, but more importantly, that He came in the name of Yahweh. To come in the name of someone is to come with all their authority. It is as if the person named were there themselves. And we know that to be the case; Jesus is God the Son and as He said in Matthew 28:18, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth*.”

Now, as usual, some of the Pharisees were scandalized by what they heard. They knew very well what this Psalm meant and that the people were proclaiming Jesus to be the Messiah. Because they refused to accept who Jesus is, they felt this was blasphemy. Accordingly, they insisted that Jesus rebuke His disciples. It is interesting to note, that in this same Psalm 118 in verse 22 it gives us the well-known statement, “*The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone.*”

Instead of rebuking His disciples, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees. He told them, “*I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!*” Think for a moment about what happened a few days later when Jesus was crucified. All the people who were praising Him had stopped doing so; they had become silent in their praise. Upon Jesus’ death, we read in Matthew 27:51, “*And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split*.” Can you imagine the amount of noise made when the rocks were split? The stones were crying out.

From the Mount of Olives is a magnificent view of the city of Jerusalem. As Jesus began the descent from the top, He would have been able to see all the beautiful structures in the city. Amongst all the celebration, all the praise, all the joyous expectancy, Jesus wept. He saw the wonderful city with the glorious temple; the city of David, the temple of God the Father. And He knew what was coming. He knew the people would reject Him and He knew that all this would be completely destroyed in just a few years’ time.

Jerusalem is very important in the Bible and in the history of the Jews. Clear back in Genesis, when the patriarch Abraham came back from fighting the forces that attacked Sodom and Gomorrah in order to rescue his nephew Lot, he was met by the king of Salem, Melchizedek. Now Salem was the original name of Jerusalem and the name “Salem” means “peace”. So, Melchizedek was the king of peace. In Genesis we also learn that Melchizedek was a priest of Yahweh. He was not of Aaron’s line or even an Israelite; yet He worshiped God and led worship of God.

In Israel, no one who was a king was allowed to be a priest. One king who did try to perform priestly duties was immediately struck with leprosy. Also, any who were priests were devoted entirely to God, they were not to become king. The LORD had established the kingly line of David so that kings of Israel were to be from the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi. In Psalm 110:4, it says of the Messiah: *The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.”*

So, Jesus is not only King, but He is High Priest; and He will hold these offices forever. When Jesus comes back to rule the earth, He will rule from Jerusalem. And He will be the King of peace.

Jerusalem was conquered by David and became the city God chose to be the center of worship. Solomon built the temple there and God showed His acceptance of it by filling the temple with smoke. His Shekinah glory was revealed there. The thing to keep in mind is that God is concerned about the people, not a city. The city is used to represent the people.

There is one other occasion where we are told that Jesus wept. It is in John 11:35. Here Jesus wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus. As Jesus stood before the tomb, He was overcome by the sadness which death brought upon those who lost loved ones. He was sad about death itself; a phenomenon that was not part of the original plan in creation. He was sad about the lack of faith in the people; the lack of faith in Him and in the power of God. Jesus wept for the people.

Jesus weeps again here for the people; the people of Israel. Even though they are praising God now and proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, in just a week, they will turn on Him and demand His death. This was the moment of their visitation; and they did not recognize it. This was the moment that their Messiah came to them; this was the moment that the One came to them who could make peace between them and almighty God. But they did not see it. They refused to see it.

They were willfully blind to the Scriptures. They wanted a conquering King of the physical world; not one who could conquer death. They looked for physical relief and physical glory; not for those things in the spiritual eternity that awaited them. The people of Jerusalem chose to ignore what didn’t suit them; and because of that, God added to their blindness. The truth was hidden from their eyes; God let them have what they wanted. Jerusalem was entirely to blame for the destruction that soon came to them.

Now, Jesus had to be rejected; He had to die. Everything He went through was to fulfill Scripture and to make a way for people to be pure, so they could be in the presence of God. Jesus knew what would happen to Him. But Jesus also left His apostles and His disciples. These people would be able to spread the good news of the Gospel once Jesus had atoned for sin and they received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

By the time Jesus went through with His work on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended back to heaven; the people should have known that Scripture was fulfilled in Him and whole-heartedly turned to Him at the preaching of His disciples. But they did not.

We know that on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, Peter preached a sermon and won 3000 souls to Jesus. He preached a few days later and brought in another 2000 men and who knows how many women. Any of us would be ecstatic to bring 5000 souls to Christ and that is a lot of people. But the population of Jerusalem was millions.

As a whole, the Israelites rejected their Saviour, and therefore rejected God. The Jews had always had a problem following God. Almost immediately upon entering the Promised Land of Canaan, they were drawn to idolatry. After centuries of sending His prophets to them, God finally brought the Babylonians against Jerusalem and they completely destroyed it. After seventy years of captivity, the Israelites were allowed to return to rebuild Jerusalem.

They tended to stay away from idolatry then, but they continued in defiance of God’s laws. At the perfect time, God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, to accomplish what the Law could not: cleanse the people of their sins. And now, at the time of their visitation, at the time of the fulfillment of God’s prophecy of redemption, at the coming of the seed of the woman, they rejected Him because they did not recognize Him.

But even as Jesus had to go through all that He did, the people of Jerusalem next rejected the message of the apostles. They were willfully blind, rejecting God’s very Son and His sacrifice, and so, God made them blind. They would not and then could not see Jesus as the Christ.

Jesus wept. He knew that in just a few years, Jerusalem would suffer God’s wrath. History shows us that in the late 60’s, Rome had enough of the religious Zealots and their rebellion. The Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem with siege works. In AD 70, Jerusalem fell to the Romans and they completely destroyed it. Jesus had said, “*they will level you to the ground and your children within you*.” Jesus is speaking to Jerusalem, so the children are the people of the city. Again, our Lord cares for the people, not the buildings.

Jesus wept over lost souls. He made a way for people to be saved, but we must accept it. We are told in 2 Peter 3:9, “*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*.” Jesus wanted each of the people in Jerusalem to turn to Him. Jesus wants all the people of the world to turn to Him. Jesus wants each of you to turn to Him.

Jesus opened the door for salvation for all who lived in Jerusalem, but as a whole, they would not enter. As a result, they underwent destruction. It was their choice. Jesus offers to each of us the chance for salvation. Accepting it is our choice. The Holy Spirit works in our lives to give us the understanding that we need Jesus; but we must take the offer.

Do not miss the day of your visitation. As the book of Hebrews quotes, “*Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts*”. The author of Hebrews goes on to explain that “today” is any day that the Lord calls you to come to Him. The Holy Spirit will give you the understanding that you need Jesus. It might happen many times during your lifetime; it may only happen once. Don’t miss it; none of us are guaranteed tomorrow. To reject Christ will be to face destruction as Jerusalem did.

If you believe you have already accepted Christ, make sure you have. Is the fruit of the Holy Spirit evident in your life? Has there been a change in the way you look at the world and what it has to offer; does it align with Christ? Did you actually, at some point in your life, confess to Jesus that you are a sinner and that you have nothing to offer Him and that you depend entirely on His mercy? Did that confession lead to life changes?

All of us need to examine our lives, to make sure we are progressing in becoming more like Jesus. The Bible is our measure; our good works, done for the glory of God, are the evidence. Don’t let today pass by. Take the hand that Jesus offers you.

And then, like Jesus, weep for those who are lost.

Prayer:

Holy God, we, Your people, lift our hearts to You in holy praise and adoration. You are worthy of worship, just for who You are. You are the holy One, the Creator of the universe; You give life. You have created each of us and we are created in Your image. You are so merciful, Lord. You are so kind. You have called people to You now for centuries; longing that they would turn to You for salvation. It is not Your desire for any to perish; but You are just and holy; You cannot let sin go free.

Father, You sent Your Son, so that we who would accept Him and His work on the cross would receive eternal life. It pleased You to crush Him for our sakes; it pleased Him to be obedient to You. May Your Holy Spirit guide us in our lives, that it may please us to be obedient to You and to be a servant of Jesus and a servant to others.

Our Saviour told us, “*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it*.” Have mercy on us Lord, bring us through that narrow gate, which is Jesus Christ.

In Jesus’ name we pray

Amen