

Welcoming Jesus into Your Life
Matthew 21:1-17
April 13, 2014
Palm Sunday

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!" When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, " 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?" And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

This Palm Sunday message begins with a question. Have you welcomed Jesus into your life? If you answered yes, I have another question for you. How far have you welcomed Jesus into your life? Since you are here this morning, I think it's safe to say you've welcomed Jesus into your Sunday morning life. But how about the other 167 hours in your week. Is Jesus the ruling force in your life – every hour of every day?

The people in today's text certainly welcomed Jesus. They welcomed him on Sunday and called for his crucifixion on Friday. That's not what we want to do, and to prevent that from happening, we are going to look at four ways to welcome Jesus into every facet of our lives. The people in the reading called out to Jesus and we need to call out to him. When we cry out to God we show our dependency on him and that puts God in his proper place in our lives – first.

When Jesus entered periphraisis, the people cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Do you know what that means? Its meaning comes in two pieces. The term "Son of David" was a synonym for "Messiah." When the people called Jesus the Son of David, they were saying that Jesus was the promised Messiah - their long-awaited Savior.

The second part is the word "hosanna." Hosanna means save us. The people were

asking Jesus to save them. Now, admittedly, the people were looking for someone to save them from Roman domination, not someone to save them from their sins. But the interesting point here is, they cried out to Jesus to save them.

How often do we cry out to Jesus to save us? And, when do we cry out to Jesus to save us – after we tried everything else and failed? We will never reach a point where we don't depend on Jesus. We need Jesus to save us from our sins. We need Jesus to save us from ourselves. And we need Jesus to save us from the situations we find ourselves in.

If we expect to make our journey through this life in holy devotion to God, then we must live our lives in complete dependence on God. God doesn't know the term part-time. He's not our part-time Savior. He's not our part-time Comforter. He's not our part-time Father. And he must never be our part-time God. God wants us as totally devoted to him as he is totally devoted to us. Total devotion equals total dependence on God.

When you expand that thought, you find that for the church – which is God's assembled people – to fulfill God's mission – which is reach the lost with the message of the Gospel – the church must put its complete faith and trust in God. God's assembled people must be totally dependent on God.

Then, this message of complete dependence on God must be demonstrated, by individuals and the church, to our community. When our community sees God moving in our lives and in our church, then our visible dependence on God will become a powerful witness.

The second way to welcome Jesus into our lives is to allow Jesus to cleanse us. I don't need to tell you that we are sinful people. Our sinfulness begins the moment we are conceived, it corrupts every moment of our lives, and it doesn't stop until we are released from our earthly existence.

In our natural, sinful state, we couldn't do anything about our sinfulness, even if we wanted to – which, in our natural state, we don't. We are so sinful that, unless the Holy Spirit intervenes, we aren't even aware of our sinfulness. By nature, we see sin as natural.

However, Jesus cannot ignore sin. As God, Jesus' perfection is offended by our sin. If it weren't for his abundant love for sinners, we would be eternally lost. When we welcome Jesus into our lives, the first thing he is going to do is clean house. God and sin cannot both exist in the same place. One or the other must leave.

As believing Christians, our knee-jerk reaction is to invite Jesus to help us rid ourselves of our sins. That's good, but it's also painful. We lead dual lives as both saints and sinners. The sinner side doesn't like losing its pleasures. The sinner side likes its natural self-centered, self-indulgent life. The sinner side resists Christ's efforts to cleanse us. Because of that, we might occasionally find Jesus upsetting some tables in

our lives, like he upset the tables of the money-changers. Right now, if Jesus took complete control of your life, what tables might he be overturning?

The same thing happens when a church honestly welcomes Jesus in as its Lord and Master. Sometimes things get a little messy for a while as Jesus upsets the tables that hold things he will not tolerate in his church. Things can get messy when Jesus makes changes that will grow his church.

One of the most important ways to welcome Jesus into our lives is to ask Jesus to hear our praise and worship. Listen once again to part of today's text: *But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, " 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"* (Mt 21:15-16).

Praise and worship are important to God. They are also important for us if we are going to welcome Jesus into our lives. Without praise and worship, we cannot keep God first in our lives. God knows that. That's why Scripture tells us over and over to praise God.

§ *I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!* Deut 32:3

§ *For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.* 1 Chron 16:25

§ *Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.* Ps 96:2

§ *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name.* Heb 13:15

Honest worship and praise welcome Jesus into our lives and into our church. And, even though the very best among us is unworthy to praise our Lord, our Lord is still worthy of our praise.

The fourth way we welcome Jesus into our lives is by asking Jesus to use us. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he knew what the coming week held. He must have had a million things on his mind. He must have been tempted to deal with a thousand different distractions. With all this going on, listen to verse 14 of the text tell us what Jesus made a priority. *"The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them"* (Mt 21:14).

The needs of the people are always a priority with God. The need of the people is why God had his plan of salvation in place before the first sin was committed. The need of the people is why Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The need of the people is why Jesus lived, died, and rose.

Picture this. With the horrors of Good Friday clearly in his mind, and being fully human himself, Jesus stops to tend to the needs of other people. He put the other people ahead of himself. Jesus cares about all the needs of all the people – then and now. Of

course, Jesus' primary mission was to rescue man from his fallen condition. From the beginning of time, it has been God's plan to bring his lost children home. However, Jesus never overlooked the physical and emotional needs of others.

Jesus always combined his care for the people's physical needs with his care for their spiritual needs. Quite often, Jesus cared for the life problems of the people so he might have the opportunity to explain God's plan of salvation.

As individuals and as a church, when we welcome Jesus into our lives, we gladly follow the example he left for us. Our primary mission is to bring people into the kingdom of God. In order to do that, we follow Jesus by caring for both the physical and spiritual needs of these people. I often tell people that you can't preach to a hungry man. That's a fact. You also can't preach to someone who is in need of clothing, shelter, comfort, understanding, love, and a host of other human needs.

Too often, Satan uses a person's physical or emotional need to block out the Gospel message. Therefore, we must follow Jesus' example of holistic care for the lost. We must remember this lyric from a contemporary Christian song: "Don't tell them Jesus loves them until you're ready to love them, too."

When you welcome Jesus into your life, you will learn to pray the four points of today's message:

God save me because I depend completely on you.

God cleanse me and remove everything in my life that isn't from you.

God hear me as I offer to you my worship and praise.

God use me to do your work in this world.