

PALM SUNDAY – WEEK OF 28 MAR 2021
JESUS AND THE SYMBOLS OF THE NEW KINGDOM
SCRIPTURE: JOHN 12:12-19

Context:

We can observe several significant symbols in the scripture passage on Palm Sunday. These symbols are used by John to reveal and represent Jesus as the Messiah and true King. The King who ushers in a new kingdom, a kingdom that continues and of which we live in. Do we observe the symbols of Jesus our King in our daily lives? What is our response to God our King this Palm Sunday and Holy Week?

Read John 12:12-19

Core Questions for Discussion

1. What are the symbols or signs that you can identify in the scripture passage (vv.12-19)?

- There are a few:
 - o Use of palm branches
 - o Crowds shouting: “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the King of Israel!”
 - o Jesus riding on a young donkey
 - o Discussion of resurrection, and Lazarus’ resurrection
 - o The Pharisees declaring “Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

2. John uses these symbols and signs to reveal and represent Jesus and Jesus ushering the new kingdom of God. Discuss in your group, some of these key symbols and signs and their significance:

- a. The use of palm branches and Jesus riding on a donkey.
 - It was the time for observing Passover. The appropriate symbols associated with the Passover would be lamb and unleavened bread. Yet the crowd used palm branches

Church theme 2021:

Jesus, Our Light In The Darkness;
A Lamp In Every Home

This theme flows from a conviction that Jesus is reminding us to follow Him closely so that we will not walk in darkness, but experience the light of His presence in our lives.

“I am the light of the world”, Jesus says, “if you follow me, you will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12).

You can revisit the Leader’s guide here:

<http://www.brmc.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/BRMC-Small-Group-Study-Guide_-3_10Jan2021_Leaders-final.pdf>

and went to meet Jesus as He entered Jerusalem.

- Palm branches would have been associated with Hanukkah – “a Jewish festival commemorating the recovery of Jerusalem and subsequent rededication of the Second Temple at the beginning of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Empire in the 2nd century BCE.” (Wikipedia: Hannukkah) This is symbolically a call to arms, a visual expectation that this king was going to be like the Maccabean leaders, successfully liberating Jerusalem by force.
- This festival is also known as the Festival of Lights (Hebrew: אֲרוֹת הַחַג, hag ha'urim). You might remember that Rev Wendy Watson shared about this festival in the first two services of 2021 and highlighted that one important aspect of the festival was living in booths or huts that were made of branches.
- The palm branches and the shouts of the crowds contrasted significantly with Jesus the declared King of Israel riding on a young donkey.
- The donkey often symbolised service, suffering, peace and humility. At verse 15 John directs us to Zechariah 9:9 which states:
“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
- The message was that this king would be different from other kings for He comes righteous, victorious, yet lowly. This king ushers in a new kingdom.

b. Resurrection (vv. 15-18)

- John refers to the sign of resurrection power as an important symbol of this new kingdom at verses 15-18.
- The resurrection of Lazarus is mentioned with the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem accounts only in here, in John. It is therefore a significant sign or symbol that John uses in relation to Jesus and His identity as the King of Israel – that this new kingdom has resurrection power.
- The account of Lazarus’ resurrection can be found in John 11.
- Jesus has power over death and power to give life. This new kingdom would therefore be a kingdom of life.
- Perhaps, John draws our attention to Ezekiel so that we can reflect on how Ezekiel was led by the Spirit of the Lord to the valley of dry bones and asked: “Son of man, can these bones live?” (Ezekiel 37:3) Ezekiel replied, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”
- Jesus is the answer to whether the dry bones of Israel can live, He has that power to resurrect and breathe life into the dead.

c. People were drawn to Jesus: “Look how the whole world has gone after Him!” (v. 19)

- The Pharisees at verse 19 prophetically declare that Jesus would draw the whole world unto Himself.

- The crowds were drawn to Jesus because of the miracle of Lazarus being resurrected from the dead. The draw of the crowds was observed by the Pharisees. Yet in this crowd were different types of people:
 - There were those who may have been like the Pharisees, negative and who had already made up their minds about the need for Jesus and Lazarus' demise (see John 12:9-11).
 - There may have been those who did believe that Jesus was the King of Israel and would free Jerusalem and Israel from oppression – they came adoring Jesus.
 - There might have been others who were curious because of what they had heard but had no understanding of who Jesus was.
- The sign or symbol of people being drawn to Jesus highlights that in the new kingdom, people would be interested for various reasons and be drawn to Him.

3. What drew you, or draws you, to Jesus?

- This is an opportunity to discuss an aspect of our faith or reliance on Jesus – this might be our “origins story”. It is also the starting point of our testimony.
- Perhaps allow your group to consider, at the time when they were drawn to Jesus, which group they were in:
 - Pharisee – negative and plotting Jesus' demise in their lives (many believers may have had this starting point, for example, Lee Strobel. See his book, *A case for Christ*, where he set out to prove that God did not exist).
 - Some may have been drawn to Jesus like the crowds, they heard of His miracles or His teachings, and went in search of Him.
 - Some may have been just naïve passers-by and encountered the crowds and out of curiosity, were drawn to find out more, or just observe.
 - Some may not identify with any of these groups – for example those born into a Christian home – for these, perhaps try to draw out that turning point when they were personally drawn to Jesus.
- Some in your group may still be naïve passers-by or by-standers. Encourage this group to also attempt the next question.
- Try to limit discussion to identifying the type of group because the next question will allow for sharing on how their origins story has been transformed, to make Palm Sunday a meaningful occasion.

4. What does Palm Sunday mean to you? Would you be willing to share the meaning of Palm Sunday with your friends and family?

- There are still symbols of importance that point us to Jesus and His new kingdom.
 - The Bible, the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the pulpit, etc
- Do we observe the workings of God through these symbols in our lives today? Whatever our origins story, are we placing our hope and trust in Jesus the King of our life, King of the new kingdom?

- In this new kingdom, do we sense the work of God, a new work in us, in our church, in our nation and in the world? Jesus is drawing the world to Himself. Can we see God at work in drawing the world to Jesus?
- Maybe, as a group, reflect on the challenge suggested by Rev Benjamin Fong in his Palm Sunday message:
 - Invite someone to join you for an online service.
 - Be ready to testify to the new you, from your origins story to God's new works in you and through you.
 - Testify to God's resurrection power in your life – He has given you new life..

Prayer Suggestions

5. Would you consider praying for:
 - a. An open door, an opportunity to share your testimony of Jesus' work in your life and to invite a friend or family to participate in a service during Holy Week.
 - b. A revelation of the true testimony of God and an overwhelming sense of His love as you continue to journey with God daily.
 - c. Friends or family that they might be drawn to Jesus.