(Mark 11:1 KJV) And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, (Mark 11:2 KJV) And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him。(Mark 11:3 KJV) And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.(Mark 11:4 KJV) And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him.(Mark 11:5 KJV) And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt?(Mark 11:6 KJV) And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go.(Mark 11:7 KJV) And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him.(Mark 11:8 KJV) And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strowed them in the way.(Mark 11:9 KJV) And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord:(Mark 11:10 KJV) Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.(Mark 11:11 KJV) And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

“Palm” Sunday is called that because of the palm leaves laid before the donkey that carried King Jesus on that Sunday before the resurrection. The great Christian writer of another generation, G.K. Chesterton, has an interesting poem personifying the donkey:

“When fishes flew and forests walk’d
And figs grew upon thorn
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then I was surely born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil’s walking parody
Of all four-footed things.

The tatter’d outlaw of the earth
Of ancient crooked will’;
Starve, scourge, deride me, I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour,
One far fierce hour and sweet;
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.”
The next Sunday after the donkey and the palm leaves will be Resurrection Sunday and the appearances of the risen Christ to the forlorn disciples, assuring them that their King has conquered, that death has lost its dominion, and that life and immortality has been brought to light, releasing men from the fear of death, and giving them the hope of a personal resurrection like unto that of the Christ.

We know why Palm Sunday got its name, but what does Palm Sunday mean? I believe we can answer that question with 4 words:

I. PROPHESY. That is the first word. God had promised throughout the Old Testament that the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One would come—when the time was right! Jesus the Messiah had come, and He had entered His ministry with the baptism of John; He had ministered in obscurity in Judea for about a year; then He and his disciples had settled in Galilee at a seaport city named Capernaum. The first year of the Great Galilean Ministry was Year of Popularity in which Jesus healed many, fed over 5,000 people at one time, and was so popular that the crowds followed Him wherever He went. Because of His views toward the Sabbath Day, and because of His open opposition to the religious leaders and their hypocrisy, and the jealousy of these same Jewish leaders, the third year of Jesus ministry was marked as The Year of Opposition.

Now Jesus enters Jerusalem, a marked Man. Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would die for the sins of the people (Isaiah 53); and John had announced the same truth at Jesus Baptism when he cried, “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” Isaiah had also said, (Isa 9:6 KJV) “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

(Isa 9:7 KJV) “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

Again and again the Prophets of Israel had proclaimed that the Messiah would indeed come. And Zechariah 9:9 had said, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, the king cometh unto thee. He is just and having salvation, lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.” Zechariah was specific—the King would come unto Jerusalem, and He would be riding a lowly donkey. One cannot deny the incredible specificity of this prophecy, or of the other Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah, they were only fulfilled in Jesus’ Ministry.

The specific prophecy of Zechariah was occurring. The Word of Prophecy was becoming the Flesh in Jesus, the Son of God.

II. PEACE! The next word is Peace, or, Shalom. As Isaiah said, His Name was Prince of Peace. However, He enters Jerusalem as the King of Peace! “Thy King cometh!”

The New Testament scholar, William Barclay, writes, “Now the whole impact of that is that the King was coming in Peace. In Palestine the ass was not a despised beast.
The ass was a noble beast. When a king went to war he rode on a horse, when he came in peace he rode on an ass...Nowadays the ass is a beast of amused contempt, but in the time of Jesus it was the beast of kings. But we must note the kind of a king Jesus was claiming to be. He came meek and lowly. He came in peace and for peace. They greeted Him as the Son of David, but they did not understand.”

Jesus was there, certainly, to give Jerusalem the final chance to repent and to be at peace. He desired that they would bow before Him and worship Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But, “He came unto His own and His own received Him not.” He was broken hearted by their rejection. Before His crucifixion He cried out over the sinful city, “O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee. How often would I have gathered thee together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings—and ye would not. Behold your house is left desolate, and I tell you now, you will not see me henceforth until the day you will say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord.” Matt. 23:37-39. Then, when Jesus left Jerusalem on the Monday or Tuesday of the last week, one of his disciples pointed to the huge stones in the temple, prompting Jesus’ reply, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.” And, in A.D. 70, their refusal to accept the Peace of God, coupled with their rebellious spirit, caused Titus to destroy the Holy City, Jerusalem, and to leave the Temple in abject ruin.

Jesus is the King of Peace. Without Him, there is no peace. I was recently thinking about the economic ruin of our nation brought about by the war in Iraq and the spikes in oil prices, and the housing crisis, and of the floods, hurricanes, tornados, and fires, and asking myself, what was happening to our great nation. I do not think it is because of the many sins we do as a nation. I think it is because that as a nation we have largely rejected the King of Peace. Men may have fortunes but fortunes do not bring peace; men may possess great power, but power does not assure any peace of mind and heart. We must get beyond the realm of the physical and serve the King of Peace whose Kingdom is Spiritual. Only in that way can we have Peace, only in that way will we ever find peace. Any other kind of peace is simply wishful thinking and idealistic utopianism. May God bless America to find His Peace. Jesus said, (John 14:27 KJV) “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

The King rode into Jerusalem. He was on a donkey to show Jerusalem that He came to offer Peace and Salvation. They rejected the King of Peace. We in America will not really find peace until we find His Peace!

III. PREDICAMENT. Predicament is the next word that reveals to us the meaning of Palm Sunday. We have already seen the predicament that the religious leaders of Jerusalem were in. They could either accept or reject Jesus, their King. They chose the latter. While many of the simple people praised Him, they seem later to have rejected Him as well, for the people would cry out in concert with the religious leaders, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

Then there was the predicament of the followers of Jesus. At Caesaera Philippi Jesus would startle them with predictions of His early death. They’d believed Him to be the Messiah who would live forever, and establish the everlasting kingdom of David, even calling Him the Son of David. These constant reminders of His impending death,
and the long periods of discourse in which He prepared them for life after He was gone, caused some of them to be very depressed, and probably caused one of them, Judas, to compromise Him and to deliver Him to His enemies. Despite, however, this personal predicament, and despite the dangers they faced, the disciples, for the most part, stood with Him.

The greatest predicament was the predicament of Jesus Himself. Before entering Jerusalem, He set His face like a flint toward that Holy City, almost as if daring them to kill Him. He would not, could not compromise.

In one of my New Testament classes, some years ago, one of my students said, “It seems to me that Jesus was plotting His own death. He had already decided to die.” While the students view sounded a bit like suicide, I would argue that Jesus did not want to die. In the Garden of Gethsemane he cried out, “Father, let this cup pass from me…” That doesn’t sound like someone who wants to die. Then He added, “Nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done.” He entered Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday because He was being totally obedient to the Voice of His Heavenly Father. When a soldier casts himself upon a grenade so that his buddies in his foxhole will live due to his death, that is not suicide, that is absolute heroism and love.

Jesus entered Jerusalem that day because of His love to His Father, and because of His love to all humanity. He was not looking to die; He was looking for Death! And He would find and defeat Death once and forever in His Victorious Resurrection over Death. Jesus was, in effect, mocking death as He came searching for the Enemy whose only power was Death, and in destroying Death, Jesus wrested Victory from the hand of the Devil, forever destroying any power the Devil might possess. Had Jesus not risen from the dead, however, the Devil would have won. Now we can cry with Paul, “O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?”

IV. PRAISE. The word that has to reflect for us Palm Sunday is the word Praise! All the saved of God praise Him.

“Praise Him, Praise Him, Jesus our blessed redeemer,
For our sins He suffered and bled and died.
He our rock our hope of eternal salvation,
Hail Him, Hail Him, Jesus the Crucified”

Forget about how the crowds later treated Jesus. Forget about how easily they were manipulated by the power structures of the day. Forget about how easily the sheep were led astray by the false shepherds. Like Chesterton’s donkey, the people had their moment too. With Jesus they were mocking the power structures of Jerusalem.

And surely, Jesus was mocking the powers of this world as He entered the city of Jerusalem upon the back of the donkey that He had asked His disciples to secure for Him. This act, though an act of Peace and Humility, was also the most striking mockery of power that one can imagine. You remember the young man standing in front of the Chinese tank at Beijing. He was defying power. A splendid example of one unafraid of power. Jesus was mocking power. In effect, He was saying to the world, “You are mortal. Your world will die with you. Your religion will die with you. In just a few years, you will be forever gone.” Human power, like human life, is rooted in mortality. Death Reigns over secular power! Men like Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Caesar, Charlemagne—
Men like these must die. Others will take their place, some worse, some better. Why, oh why do we put the temporal above the Eternal, Caesar above the Christ? God mocks the powers of this world. (Psa 144:4 KJV) “Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away.”

(Isa 29:5 KJV) “Moreover the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away: yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly.”

(1 John 2:16 KJV) “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world”

(1 John 2:17 KJV) “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

But the praise of the poor was beautiful. The people soon realized what Jesus was doing, and they also joined in mocking the power of this world, putting garments before the feet of the donkey, breaking palm leaves and placing them before this beast of burden carrying Him who is carrying the burden of the world, and crying out praise! “Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.”

Should our praise be any less than theirs who knew so little about Who He Really Was and Is? James Stewart of Scotland said that we had a Duty of Praise, first for God’s sake, then for the sake of our own souls, then for the sake of others. That day the am ’ha arets, the people of the land, living in Jerusalem went all out in praising the King of Peace astride a borrowed donkey. He entered the world in a stable. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He left the suburbs of Jerusalem on a cloud of Shekinah Glory.

“All hail the power of Jesus Name,
Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown Him Lord of all.”

As the psalmist said, “While I have any being I will praise the Lord!”

This Palm Sunday we must put Him first and praise His Holy Name. Amen.