

SERMON - PALM SUNDAY, April 21, 2019

I grew up in NYC where most people don't even know who their neighbor is. In a small town everyone knows everyone else and almost everyone is related in some way to each other. Maplewood is a small town. Maplewood may have lost some of its small town flavor over the years, but Maplewood has still maintained much of what we still call a "small town." When there is some kind of news, it doesn't take days, it takes only hours before everyone in Maplewood knows about it. If we had a communication system like that in the military, we might have been able to knock a couple of years off of World War II. In the time of Jesus Bethany was a small town. Everyone knew Lazarus who lived in Bethany. He had two sisters, Martha and Mary. Jesus was Lazarus' friend. Imagine in Maplewood if someone that we all knew died. The funeral was served and our neighbor was already buried in the ground for four days. Jesus was summoned when Lazarus was critically ill, but the Lord does not return to Bethany until Lazarus is already dead and buried in the tomb for four days. Imagine if our neighbor in Maplewood had a friend who was famous as a prophet and supposedly could perform miracles. Suppose this stranger comes to Maplewood and tells us to open the grave of our neighbor. Suppose this stranger calls our neighbor by name and tells him to get up out of the grave. Our neighbor rises up and climbs up out of the grave. Can you imagine the astonishment and how much rejoicing there would be? We would adore and be in awe of this stranger who has the power to raise people from the dead. Within minutes everyone in Maplewood and the surrounding regions would know about this stranger and would come out to see him and sing his praises. This is what happens to Jesus today as He makes His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Everyone is shouting, singing, dancing and waving palm branches, hailing Jesus as a King. This morning, with our palms and pussy willows held high, we stand in midst of Jerusalem, surrounded by the children who have gathered and are dancing in the streets! We can see the indescribable joy on their faces! The news has spread about the Messiah...and He has **finally** come to fulfill the prophecies that had been spoken about Him throughout the centuries! We have been hearing in the Gospels of these past days, just as those in Jerusalem and Bethany had heard the rumors, about a Man who raised Lazarus from the dead. We imagine the shock and awe of all the witnesses, who just four days earlier had attended his funeral gave him the last kiss...and pulled a rock over his tomb. Now those same witnesses see the dead man eating dinner and carrying on normally, while hosting the God-Man at a dinner! Of course, news of this miracle spread through the streets like wildfire, and thousands upon thousands went out to the streets on this day to get a glimpse of this Savior. We stand mystically present in those streets today, as God Himself mounts a colt that has never been ridden, and is surrounded by the praises of the entire city who has come out to meet Him. They take their cloaks off of their backs to lay on the ground! They are climbing the trees to get a glimpse of the King! They are singing in the streets and acknowledging that the Messiah is here! There are no more secrets to keep. No more quiet teachings! No more parables trying to figure out how salvation will come about...all of that is now over! We no longer will hear from our Lord the words: "my hour has not yet come..."... because today, His hour HAS come. And it is this reason, my dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, that even if we were not excited and didn't fully comprehend this feast day, our Lord said that the rocks would cry out in jubilation for us! So intense is the joy at the presence of the king, that even the inanimate creation will sprout mouths to praise Him! This is the happiness that is piercing our hearts this morning! This is the type of Joy that animates the children...because they all instinctively feel that God is with them. The joy we celebrate today will sustain us through the dark days ahead, the mocking, beatings, spitting and crucifixion. But in a week the joy will return in the Resurrection, and that joy which we will then experience will be far greater than the joy we experience today. Let us make every attempt to try to attend as many of the services this week that we can so that we can accompany the Lord and walk with Him through the events that will take place this week. In doing so, may our joy be greater and more meaningful when the last great day finally arrives and the Lord rises from the tomb,

trampling down death by death, and breathes new life into the world and into our hearts.
Amen!