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March 25, 2018 – Palm Sunday

Text: **Psalm 24:7-10** (Introit) (NIV)

⁷ *Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*

⁸ *Who is this King of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.*

⁹ *Lift up your heads, you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*

¹⁰ *Who is he, this King of glory?
The Lord Almighty—
he is the King of glory.*

Jesus is finally coming home. Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. His journey has come to an end. He will spend the next few days getting his affairs in order and preparing his disciples for what must come next. His riding into town is quite the celebration. He arrives like a conquering hero. The celebration is certainly one to behold. Huge crowds come out to greet Jesus.

The palm branches and the cheering people are something to see, though it's still not quite what it would have been like back in King David's day or even for a hero in Jesus' own day. "No tramp of soldiers' marching feet with banners and with drums," that's what a Roman hero would get. A victorious general, a popular governor, or certainly Caesar himself could expect a big fanfare. The martial step of the soldiers, the beat of the drums, the blasts from the trumpets would be deafening and thrilling all at the same time. The city gates don't open for him in welcome. Instead, he picks an otherwise normal Sunday to ride into town while the city's business goes on around him.

The parade King David led bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem was a massive affair as well. All sorts of pomp and circumstance. Music and dancing and all sorts of things. Probably the biggest celebration anyone had seen in David's day. With both the Ark and Palm

Sunday, God is home, the place where he puts his name, the place where he demonstrates the kind of God he really is.

So Jesus, the King of Kings comes riding in to Jerusalem amidst much fanfare. It's isn't really a surprise though. If you were going to go anywhere significant in Israel, it would have to be Jerusalem. Jerusalem the fortress city, up on the mountain, with God's temple and the king's palace, the perfect city for Jesus, the most fitting city for him in the whole country.

Obviously the Pharisees and priests aren't really glad to see him. They can't keep him away though. This is his city, his house. This is where he belongs. This is where God has made himself known in a unique and special way. He lives in the midst of a people he has claimed as his own treasured possession. He's come to the very heart of his people. Their whole national identity could be condensed in this one city.

It's no surprise to find this Psalm used on a day like today. King David calls out to the entrances of the city to open and greet the King of glory. He doesn't refer to himself, of course, but the Lord, the King who reigns in glory over all creation. Let nothing bar the way for the King of glory! The King is coming and he will rule in justice and mercy over all of his people.

Jesus is coming to continue the work of the Old Testament. God sat enthroned between the cherubim on the Ark. You could find a lot of things in any big, cosmopolitan city anywhere else in the world, but only here would you find the Temple, God's own house, the place where the worship of God encompassed every sense. It was seen, heard, smelled, touched, and tasted. So too was God's mercy. Here was where sinners found salvation. God called to them. Sinners heard his call and responded by coming to him and he pronounced his forgiveness to them.

Jesus the King was coming back to Jerusalem to reign on his throne. His throne would look a lot different than the Ark. "With every step the cross draws near, the King of glory's throne." This is why the Pharisees and priests didn't want him. This isn't the king they wanted. This isn't the glory they wanted. If they'd had the power, they'd have barred the doors and locked him out. If they'd had the ability, they would have had him killed a long time ago.

He doesn't sound so much like a King of glory. More like the unwanted king. Even the regular folks, the ones who were cheering him on only days ago now want him dead. They should be giving the King of glory a golden crown or a laurel wreath. But no, "The palms, how soon laid down. No bloom of leaf but only thorn, the King of glory's crown." They don't just reject him. They humiliate him. They make him suffer the worst torments they can devise and

then, only after all of that. They execute him. If they could have just locked him out and shut him up, they might have done that. But the King will not be denied his throne.

King David's call goes unheeded by them. They do not want to open the doors to him because they don't want him to be the king. They want to be in charge. They want to do things their way. If there's going to be any king, it'll be the one they choose. All of their secret and not so secret sins and only someone who will feed them can be allowed in the door. Which works out to mean, they want to be in charge of who is in charge.

They see Jesus coming up to the gates of the city and know if they don't oppose him he's going to come in and tell them their bragging about all of the good things they've done doesn't impress anyone. He'll tell them their defrauding of vulnerable people, even their own elderly parents, is deplorable and must be stopped. He'll tell them what he tells his own disciples, that to be the greatest you must instead become the least, the servant of all. Jesus rejects everything they've been doing. They don't want a King of glory because they want all of the glory for themselves.

King David says, "Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in!" Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me." If the King of glory were to ride up to the doors here this morning, would you be rushing to open them for him? You know what it would mean. He would look at you and know every sinful secret you keep bottled up. He would see through every lie you've told. He would know how empty every boast you make is. Even if you can back it up, you only feel the need to make it because you need to show off and have people look up to you. All of those times you feel the need to prove you're the best, the King will see as your ego really running the show.

Better to shut him out. Better to lock the door. You keep him out and you still get to be king. You get to be in control of your own life and you don't have anyone looking down on you and telling you what you can and can't do. You get to be king. You get the glory.

It's a sticky problem. We want to be in control. If a king is going to come in, we want to be able to tell him what to do. But we also want that king to be strong enough to do the things we want.

In Christ we find everything we aren't looking for. When we're looking for someone we can control, Jesus reveals himself as the King, the one who reigns over all creation. We can't

give him orders and he knows everything there is to know about us. Even the things we wished were hidden. When we want a strong and mighty king who can accomplish everything we want, Jesus doesn't ride into town with mighty armies. He chooses a servant's form and stoops down to wash feet.

Our egos can't bear to associate with him. Our pride sees him as wrong in so many ways, but King David tells the gates and doors to open and let him in. This all-powerful king who becomes a servant should be invited in, must be invited in. This King of glory knows what's in your heart and knows you are unable to let go of your ego, even if it kills you. He has to come in to save you from yourself. He has to come in to reign. He has to come in to show us that power, might, and glory are not found in being the greatest, but in being the least. As God tells St. Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." So Jesus comes, not with trumpets and drums, not with armies and bodyguards, not with a golden crown and royal robes. He rides in on a donkey, dressed as a servant. He reveals a glory we do not know and could never attain. A glory that comes only through service, sacrifice, and love, a glory that looks to the needs of others and cares for them above your own.

The king comes in to our presence. He calls on you to set aside your ego and pride, to put away your secrets and lies and learn from him, follow him in the path of glory, the path of service. All of the glory our ego wants and tries to gain through bragging, lies, theft, slander, and everything else are found instead through him on the path of service, sacrifice, and love. We want to be known, we want to be respected and thought well of, we want to be loved. Our pride uses the world to feed itself in the hopes of gaining all of these things. But in the end, the way of pride is the way of loneliness and desolation.

King David calls on us to throw open the doors and let the King of glory in. The king comes into our presence today to cast out our egos which seek only to feed themselves. He shows us where glory is. The king of glory's throne is the cross where he serves, sacrifices, and loves, his throne of grace where forgiveness and life are found. The king has attained his glory because he serves, sacrifices, and loves. We can't earn glory for ourselves by feeding our egos, so he comes here to feed us instead, the fruits of his sacrifice and love are served to us in his very body and blood. The king of glory comes into our presence and we shout for joy because his glory comes with him. He serves us and shows us the way of glory in service to others.

So welcome the king of glory, who is both humble servant and mighty king. He brings

glory we have not seen and will never find. He brings the glory we all crave but could never achieve. We shout “Hosanna! Save us, O King of glory! Show us the servant’s way that we may learn from you. Save us from our sin and pride. Make us your servants, that we may share your glory. Let us heed the call of King David and throw open the doors of every place and proclaim to the world, ‘Behold, behold your King!’”