

Sermon for Sunday, April 8, 1979, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"TIME FOR A NEW DREAM"

St. Matthew 21:1-17

Text: "If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them',
and he will send them immediately." St. Matthew 21:3

I don't know how many times I have read the triumphal story of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, but I feel reasonably sure this is at least the 25th time I have preached on Palm Sunday. Yet, I never cease to be amazed by the event! It still seems incredible to me that the people of Jerusalem would cheer Jesus on Sunday and hail him as the descendant of David, and then by Friday, be howling for his crucifixion.

Actually, I suppose they had some good reasons. Their entire field of interest centered on themselves, on their situation, their problem. We are all guilty of that. It doesn't matter how insignificant we are to the rest of the world, we ourselves are the most important people in our own world. We matter the most to ourselves. Big events may be transpiring in the world. Great people may be doing great things. But the most important thing in our lives is what is happening to us. That's natural, isn't it? For example, back when the Egypt-Israeli peace treaty was being signed, the fact that our car broke down probably got more of our attention. So, our own world tends to revolve around us and what is going on in our lives

That's what happened to the Jews. It is true they lived in a remote region of the Roman Empire. It is true that Jerusalem was hardly even a second-rate city. It is true that in the scheme of things of that day, they were a little known and hardly cared about people. Yet, what was happening in their lives was important to them. They were the center of their world and they were the most important people in it.

The second thing I would have you notice is that these people were also important to Jesus. What happened in their lives, what was important to them was also important to Jesus. That's the way Jesus is. People are important to Him even when they are not important to anybody else. Take blind Bartemaeus. When he cried out to Jesus, people told him to be quiet, because he wasn't important. But he was to Jesus. Or take the man who was lame who sat by the pool hoping someone would help him into the water when the angel of God stirred the water. Nobody thought he was important enough to help out with his problem. But Jesus did. Or take the woman at the well in Samaria. She was so poorly thought of that she went to the well for water at a time when nobody else would be there because they treated her like so much dirt. She wasn't important to them. But she was to Jesus. And who cared about those rag-tag Jews in that remote province of Judea? Nobody cared much about them. Rome sent only its second or third-rate men to oversee it. But Jesus cared.

And that's nice to know, isn't it? It is comforting to know that no matter who we are, or how unimportant we are, or how many failures mar our lives, or how little others think of us, we matter to Jesus. I want to remind you of that this morning. There are a lot of great people in the world today - great scientists, great statesmen, great leaders, big movie stars, and a lot of important people. But for Jesus, you are as important to Him as they are. I don't know about you, but that comforts me. I'll never be a Billy Graham or a Dwight Moody, or a Luther or a Calvin. But I'm just as important to Jesus as they were.

And then, there is another side to that coin. Whoever I am - however much money I've accumulated, however important my job is, whatever my social status, whatever clubs I belong to, whatever community I live in, the poorest, most insignificant bum on skid row is just as important to Jesus as I am. We need to remember that.

That helps us get things in perspective as it relates to God.

But this still leaves the question as to why they crucified Jesus. Do you know why? It was because he didn't want for them what they wanted for themselves. Do you have that problem with God? I know I do. I know pretty well what I want from life. I know what things I need, the things I want, the things that will make me happy. There's just one problem. That's not necessarily what God wants for me. Is that true in your life? Don't you know pretty well what you want, what you need, what would make you happy? Yet, when we pray about it and ask God for those things, we discover that isn't necessarily what he wants for us.

Well, that's what happened to the Jews. They knew what they wanted - they wanted a king like David who was a great warrior, who could muster the troops and defeat the enemy. They wanted freedom. They wanted to drive out the Romans. They wanted to be mighty again. Under Solomon, centuries before, they had been one of the great nations of the world. Now they wanted to be like that again. The only problem was, that wasn't what Jesus wanted.

Now, I've said three things. I've said I'm the most important person in my world; I've said I'm important to Jesus; I've said I know what I want for my life, but it may not be what Jesus wants. So, when the Jews were important to themselves, when they realized they were important to Jesus, when they expected Jesus to give them what they wanted, -- then they crucified him when he wouldn't do it.

What is the most important church in the world as far as we are concerned? For me, it is Central. And Central is also important to Jesus. But is what I want for Central the same thing Jesus wants?

What is the most important person or the most important family in the world? Is it yours - as far as you are concerned? And what do you want for your family - for your children - for your loved ones? Is it the same thing Jesus wants?

Let me share with you something I have relearned this week. Maybe you already know it, too, and we both need to be reminded of it. Jesus wanted to do something absolutely fantastic with the Jews. He was going to make them great in a way that they never dreamed of. And even after they turned him down, still he took the eleven disciples that were left, and using them as a sort of core group, he literally turned the world upside down. The Jews had one idea of greatness, but Jesus had another. He had a new dream, a new vision they couldn't begin to imagine. I think that's our problem, too. Jesus has a new dream for us we can't begin to imagine! You see, the Jews got in a rut. Their vision of life was so narrow and short and limited. Jesus wanted to take them and raise them to new heights of grandeur. He wanted to do an incredible, astonishing thing with them. But do you know what the trouble was? They couldn't believe God for a new dream!

How about us? isn't it true that we have a very limited and provincial vision? Take our church. My, how God has blessed us here at Central. And we have a lot of exciting things going on. We are doing a lot of different programs and there are a lot of ministries going on. But is that all God wants to do with us? Actually most of our programs are not new or different. Are there some new dreams, some new visions that God has for us if we dare to be different, dare to risk, dare to be visionary?

I think of some of the great men of times past who were great for the Lord. They were always people who broke out of the ordinary mold, who broke out of the traditional and ordinary ways of doing things. They were men who caught a new vision, who dreamed a new dream, and God blessed their vision and used them to do new and

different and exciting things. What do you think God wants to do with this congregation? How big is our vision, how great is our dream?

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem and in his mind and heart was an incredible vision for the people of God. But their dream was so small, so limited, so narrow. And when the dream of Jesus didn't match theirs, they crucified him.

What about your own life? Are you settled in on a job, a career? Is your dream - your vision - for your life pretty well settled, fairly well set? Maybe there are exciting things God wants to do with your life. Maybe there are visions God has for you that you can't imagine! Is what you want for your life what Jesus wants? You know, I suspect there are many of you here this morning who have talents and abilities and capabilities that are hardly used. What could you do with your life if you had a vision for God, a dream for Jesus?

You know, one of the most fascinating parts of the Palm Sunday story to me has to do with our text for today. Jesus sent his disciples to a village to get an animal to ride into Jerusalem. Now, I don't know who the animal belonged to. I don't know what they knew about Jesus or what their relationship to him was. The Bible simply doesn't tell us. Yet, it does tell us that when they were informed of the need of Jesus, they put what they had at his disposal. Look at our text for today! It says, "If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'the Lord has need of them,' and he will send them immediately."

Isn't that astonishing? Whoever this person or persons was, the minute they found out Jesus needed what they had, the Bible says, "and he will send them immediately." I wish somebody could say that about me and my relationship to God. Do you? They just put what they had at the disposal of Jesus and he used it to begin to change the whole world.

What could God do with this congregation if we did that? What incredible dream, what fantastic vision does God have for us, needing only our surrender to his will? What great thing could God do with your life, what great dream does God have for you, needing only you to put yourself at his disposal?

Do you remember the story of the Rich Young Ruler? He came to Jesus because there was something missing in his life. He wanted to be blessed somehow. But what he wanted and what Jesus wanted for him were two different things. Jesus told him to get rid of what he had and to come follow him. He couldn't do that. That wasn't his dream. His own view was too narrow, too provincial, too limited. When Jesus and his disciples walked off, they were walking into the future. What was to happen in the world lay with them, and not with the rich young ruler. What would have happened to him, what would he have been, what would history have recorded of him had he put himself at the disposal of Jesus?

What about you? Maybe your view of life is narrow and self-centered and provincial - just ordinary and hum-drum. What could Jesus do with your life, what vision, what dream, could he place in your heart if you took who and what you are and put yourself at his disposal?

So, here on Palm Sunday, Jesus came to Jerusalem. He had a new dream, a vision for the future. They were important to themselves, they were important to him - but was what they wanted for their lives what he wanted?

Is what you want for your life what Jesus wants?