This morning we will take a break from our journey through Acts to honor and remember this important day on the Christian calendar, the day known as Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week.

I have taught on Palm Sunday several times in my nine years at Colonial, including a thorough treatment of the gospel accounts in Luke and Matthew. Consequently, this morning we will turn our attention to John’s gospel which provides a quite different perspective of that day in a way that compliments and informs the other gospels. Our text, therefore, will be John 12:20-33. Please stand and let us read the Word of God aloud together.

You’ll notice that our text does not refer to Jesus riding on a colt as He enters into Jerusalem. That account is in John’s gospel earlier in chapter 12, and I’m hoping that part of the story is familiar for most of you. If you need to brush up on that part, feel free to look up or Google John 12:12-19 and you can skim through that as I conclude my introductory remarks. I also encourage you to check out my message on Palm Sunday from 2016 and the appropriate sermons on Luke 19 that are available online from my former series in Luke. Our part of the story for this morning actually occurs a bit later presumably on that same day, perhaps even as Jesus is still making His way into the city.

So, if you look at John 12:20 and following, we see that as Jesus is coming into the city among the throngs of people waving palm branches and declaring Him to be the King of the Jews, there are some Greeks who approach the disciple Philip and ask, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” When Philip informs his fellow disciple Andrew of the Greek’s request, they together go and inform Jesus. What follows is a response from Jesus that begins with these words, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

Now, in case you find that response to be frustrating, you should know that Jesus regularly answers a question with what is true on a much larger scale rather than simply responding to a trivial question or request. This is one of those times.

Now what is it about some Greek men wanting to meet Jesus that triggers this response? First of all, we must remember that the prophecies surrounding the Messiah always included the prediction that the Savior from God would be “a light to the Gentiles.” When Jesus learns that the Greek men…the Gentiles…are seeking Him out, Jesus interprets that information within the context of scripture. And so he says, “The hour has come…”
Now, let’s sit on that for just a minute. If you’ve ever read the four gospels, you know that Jesus said on multiple occasions, “My hour has not yet come.” He says almost exactly those words or those words are repeated by John in John 2:4, John 7:30, and John 8:20. In fact, throughout the four gospels we find this almost frustrating tendency in Jesus to hide from the public right at the moment when He could have had thousands rise up and make Him a king (John 6:15). It’s one of the reasons that Palm Sunday is so ironic and intriguing to those who have studied Jesus. Here is a man who regularly ran away from adoring crowds, who commanded people on several occasions (Mark 1, Mark 5, Mark 7, Luke 8, Matt. 9) not to tell anyone who He was or what He had done. And yet, on this day, He knowingly enters into Jerusalem riding on a colt. He does it on purpose, knowing that every God-fearing Jew would remember the prophet Zechariah’s prophecy, “Behold, your King is coming sitting on a donkey’s colt!” Zech. 9:9 and would immediately declare him to be the King of the Jews, particularly given the testimony of many people who saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead (John 12:17) several days earlier. When the crowds cry out and adore Jesus on the road leading into Jerusalem, he does not tell them to be quiet. When the Pharisees scold him and order him to tell the rabble to be quiet lest the Romans suspect an uprising, Jesus responds in Luke 19:40, “If they were quiet, the stones would cry out!”

Why does Jesus have a sudden shift in his PR policy? He states it clearly right here in vs. 23, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Now is the time that all of history has been waiting for. Now…on this day…this week…the hour has finally arrived. This is the fulfillment of several prophecies, but more importantly, it marks the hinge of history. Now, at this hour, the Son of Man will be glorified…and all that follows will present the world’s only hope for salvation.

Now when we think of a King, a mighty Savior, being glorified, it makes sense that the adoring crowds are waving palm branches and throwing their cloaks on the ground. What doesn’t make sense is what Jesus says next in John 12:24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Jesus knows…he knows that his glorification will not be in the fall of Rome and the national dominance of Israel as his adoring crowds anticipate. He knows his glorification will not include a gold crown and an exalted throne, rather his glorification will require a criminal’s cross and a crown of thorns. Jesus knows His glorification, and the hope for the world, will require His death. His death will release and bring about the fruit that God has planned for the good of all mankind.

Now, we’re going to skip down to vs. 27 where Jesus becomes introspective, pondering aloud the meaning of “this hour.” Jesus reveals his inner condition, saying in vs. 27, “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”
Notice the emotional intensity and the honesty that the very human Jesus shares with his disciples. His soul is troubled…how could it not be? He who knew no sin will become sin. He who was perfect and without blemish will soon become the sacrificial Lamb of God, and he will take upon Himself the wrath of God, the justice that God’s law requires, so that sinful humanity might be saved and reconciled to the Father. Jesus has read the prophecies…He now knows what awaits Him. So he confesses that His soul is troubled…I suspect that is the understatement of the century.

But notice how Jesus handles his fears. He admits that his instinct, as would be the case for all of us who are on the eve of suffering, is to ask God to save Him from that fate. Yet Jesus reasons that it was for this purpose…the purpose of saving the souls of men and women…that Jesus came to this hour in the first place.

We will see this kind of wrestling happen again later in the Garden of Gethsemane in Luke 22. Jesus will cry out to the Father, “If you are willing, take this cup away from me!” And yet, there in the garden, Jesus will come to the same resignation as he does here in vs. 28, “Father, glorify your name.” Jesus resigns to the will of the Father, for Jesus is always intent on bringing glory to the Father at any cost, even as the Father is intent on glorifying the Son.

John reports that the Father responds to the Son in vs. 28, “Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ Jesus lets those around Him know that God spoke these words for their sake…so that his disciples might remember that God allowed Jesus to go to the cross on purpose…for His glory, which is ultimately the hope of the world.

Now, in the next two verses, Jesus reveals three insights into God’s plan of salvation that will happen this week through the passion of Christ. Look at vss. 31-32, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

First, Jesus says, “Now is the judgment of this world.” What does that mean? It means that this world murdered the Son of God. It means that when God became flesh and dwelt among us…when we got an opportunity to see untainted perfection, perfect love, unblemished beauty, and unconditional grace…it so offended our evil natures that we had to destroy him. By the way, you should know that any number of great and famous books, movies, and plays have been based upon this very theme. Our darkness cannot stand to be revealed by light. Our selfishness cannot stand to be exposed by another’s generosity. Our ugliness cannot stand to be put on display by the beauty of one standing close by. So when Jesus, the perfect human life, is nailed to a cross by a world filled with hatred…that world is judged and condemned once and for all. What is the charge? Deicide…the murder of God’s Son…the ultimate crime of crimes. Charles Spurgeon
writes, “Truly was the world guilty of all that the prophets ever charged it with, and much more. When wicked men slew the Prince of life, the Holy One and the Just, then was it proven that the world is at heart atheistic, that it hates God, and would put God himself to death if he were within its grasp.”

Remember how Jesus predicted this ultimate crime in Matthew 21 in the parable of the wicked tenants. Remember how the wicked tenants kill the son of the Owner saying, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him and take his inheritance.” Matthew 21:38. When the Son of the owner is slaughtered by the tenants, the judgment is fixed. The Owner will have His justice. Justice is coming for all of us tenants…the blood of the Son is on the hands of the world. The judgment is guilty, and God’s wrath will descend upon all whose sins nailed His perfect Son to a cross; that is, saving those who repent and call upon the blood of the Son for the forgiveness of their crime. We’ll come back to that hope in just a minute.

Notice also what Jesus says in vs. 31, “Now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” Who is the “ruler of this world” that Jesus is referring to? Is it not the Prince of Darkness, the one cast out of heaven who has ruled the hearts of men with an iron fist for centuries?

Can we not agree that there is an evil in the world that goes beyond human ignorance…an evil in the world that is supernatural and unrelenting? An evil in the world that controls the hearts and minds of human beings through guilt and shame, leading to horrendous acts such as we’ve seen even this week in our country and everywhere around the world? Surely there is one who hates us, one who torments the human soul, one who drives us to despair with his unrelenting accusations.

Many of us question not only the existence of Satan, but also why God in His sovereignty would allow Satan to have any rule or authority on earth at all. The answer is simple: Satan finds his justification and establishes his power based on his accusation of sinners. The book of Revelation reveals that day and night Satan stands before the throne of God accusing us all of our sin and the punishment we all deserve. If we’re honest, we’ve all heard his accusations against us. In our darkest moments, we agree with our Accuser…we are guilty, and we know it. The ruler of this world, as Jesus calls him, has flaunted his power upon all human souls due to their sinful condition, but here in John 12:31 Jesus says, “NO MORE! My hour has come, and beginning now, the ruler of this world will be undone.” How does that work? Here’s how: when Jesus suffers the cross and satisfies God’s justice that sin requires, the Enemy of our souls, the Ruler of this world, loses his authority…he is defeated once and for all. John writes in Revelation 12:10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.”
Listen: if you are a Christian, it doesn’t mean that Satan stops harassing you and accusing you of your sin…that doesn’t stop until we cross over into heaven. However, when Satan accuses us of our sin, as believers we are to respond, “Yes, but Christ died.” As Paul writes in Romans 8:1, “There is no longer condemnation for those who are in Christ.” This freedom from the Evil One is what Jesus knows His hour will accomplish…it is why He will suffer the cross…it is why He will lay down His life for sinners. It’s the only way we might ever experience freedom in this life and eternal life in the next. Make no mistake: for those who remain unforgiven and unsaved by the blood of Jesus, the torment of the Evil One goes on unchecked, and the justice for our sin will be on our heads for all eternity. It must be so. If it were not so, the cross would be for naught.

Finally, Christ declares in vs. 32, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” And John adds in vs. 33, “He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.”

The crowd on the road leading into Jerusalem believed that their long awaited Messiah would be glorified when He ran off the Romans and established his Kingdom that would never end. They could never imagine that the means by which the Messiah would draw the world unto Himself would be a Roman cross. But that’s what Jesus just said. He said, “When I am lifted up from the earth…”

Some people like to believe those words are referring to when Jesus ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. They don’t like to think of Jesus having to die on a cross because the cross is shameful and embarrassing. Did you know that some Muslims believe that Jesus ascended to be with God in heaven? I had some Muslims tell me that a few weeks ago. They believe Jesus was taken up into heaven, but they don’t believe he died on a cross.

Others like to believe that when Jesus is proclaimed, when He is exalted as the matchless King of Glory, then will people be drawn to His strength and power.

But John does us all the favor of clarifying what His master said in no uncertain terms: “Jesus said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.”

Jesus was referring to that moment when He would be lifted up from the earth…nails pierced, feet pierced, body filleted, his head dripping with blood from his crown of thorns…it would be at that moment, it would be through that most horrific event, it would be through His sacrificial death for sinners, that people would be drawn to Jesus. If Jesus does not willingly die on that cross, there is no hope for the world…no atonement, no forgiveness…just judgment and the wrath of God poured out upon sinful souls.
Now Look again at what Jesus said: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth…I will draw all people to myself.”

The cross doesn’t draw people…Jesus on the cross draws people, and He draws people by virtue of His sacrifice made on the behalf of sinful people. What kind of people? All kinds of people. From what parts of the world? All parts of the world. From which tribe and tongue…from what nations? From every tribe, tongue, and nation. Jesus crucified, the Lamb of God slain for sinners, is the means by which Jesus draws all people to Himself. No earthly throne, no demonstration of power, no amount of riches, no palatial palace, no famous invention, no ethical teachings could ever serve to draw untold billions of souls like the cross of Jesus Christ.

I don’t know what you imagine…what pictures come to your mind when you close your eyes and worship God. I will tell you what images have recently come into my mind, particularly when we are singing together as the church. I begin to see images of so many people I know from all over the world, those I have known throughout the years in the different churches I have served, those who have passed on to be with Jesus…and I begin to imagine all of them standing with us, hands raised, with great smiles and unbridled joy as they join me…as they join us in praising the Lamb! I see friends from China, India, Africa, Guatemala, Haiti…I see my sisters and brothers from Wisconsin, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and so many other places around our country. I see my grandparents, I see my parents, I see the apostles and those who have championed the gospel throughout the ages…Charles Spurgeon, G. Campbell Morgan, C.S. Lewis, Dallas Willard, Jean Calvin, Martin Luther, Mother Theresa, Mary Magdalene, Esther and Ruth, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Joshua, Caleb and Jeremiah…thousands upon thousands upon millions upon billions from every corner of the world…and we all know each other…and we all love Jesus! We all worship God! We are all enveloped in the Holy Spirit! Jesus said, “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself.” One day…not so long from now…we will be in that great cloud of witnesses who have been drawn to the Lamb…and what a day that will be, amen!

How much of that vision Jesus sees now on the dusty road leading into Jerusalem we will never know. But this much He is convicted of already: The cross will not be His defeat…it will mark His final victory over all that separates men and women from their Father in heaven. It will mark the end of the Enemy’s reign. The cross will bring forgiveness and salvation to a judged and condemned world, and all people everywhere will be drawn to the Lamb who died for them.

Later in John 12, Jesus will say these words, “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word I have spoken will judge him on the last day.”
As always, Jesus reminds us that in the end, there will only be two kinds of people in the world: those who believe in Jesus and enter into the light, no more to walk in darkness; or those who reject His words, and thereby reject His atoning sacrifice, who will find themselves standing before the Judge on the last day, doomed to darkness for all eternity. I pray that we might all be those found in the light of Christ; and that we would commit the rest of our lives to lead others into that light as well.

As we enter into Holy Week, allow the sober and powerful message of this text to grip your heart and cause you to reflect upon the Passion of Christ. I invite you to join us on Friday evening as we enter into the dark shadow of the cross. I invite you to be with us on Resurrection Sunday, when we join the disciples in the mystery of the empty tomb. All throughout the week we have interactive experiences for the whole family to see and experience the Passion of Christ and the power of His resurrection. May this week be a season of spiritual awakening and revival for you and your family.

The Gentiles request of Philip is where we began this morning. They said, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” I pray you have seen Him today, and I pray you will respond to His invitation to place your faith in Him. Let us pray.