

Today is Palm Sunday, the day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Matthew 21:1-9 describes how the crowds put their coats and palm branches on the ground, which is similar to the modern day red carpet or a wedding runner, on which those who are being honored may walk. The reception that Jesus received was fitting for the arrival of the King of Israel. But we know that Israel's praise soon turned to hostility, which led to Jesus' crucifixion.

However, this was not the first time Jesus presented Himself to Israel, and it's not the first time they rejected Him. In Matthew 9 Jesus is almost like a traveling road show, going from town to town throughout Israel. During this ministry we see Jesus heals a paralytic (vv. 1-8), He provides spiritual healing to Matthew by calling him to follow Him (vv. 9-13), He revives a dead girl and heals a bleeding woman (vv. 18-26), and He heals two blind men and a man who was demon-possessed (vv. 27-34). After these rapid fire accounts of healing, Matthew provides a summary statement in v. 35, which says that Jesus went through all the towns preaching the good news and healing every disease and sickness.

Most of us probably would like to have Jesus come to heal our physical ailments, for many of us are suffering physically in one way or another. Yesterday there were many rallies held to address gun violence, even in nearby downtown Walnut Creek. There are many people suffering because of this violence. But while the issue of guns should be addressed, it is not going to fix the root cause of the violence. Their focus is misplaced. The problem is not the weapons in the hands of the perpetrators, but the brokenness of their heart that drove them to commit these crimes. It's the heart that needs healing, and neither Sacramento nor Washington can fix people's hearts. Such great suffering is the result of our fallen sin-cursed bodies. And nobody can fix that except Jesus. And we see in v. 36 that Jesus has compassion on the crowds, who were suffering as we are today. He didn't come to Jerusalem to seek glory and honor, but to bring salvation to His people. They were like sheep without a shepherd. The leaders of Israel could not help them, so they needed Jesus to have compassion on them.

So in vv. 37-38 Jesus gathers the disciples and prays for more workers. This passage is often interpreted as a call to missions, but in this context the workers Jesus is referring to are the disciples themselves, whom He sends out in chapter 10 to preach the gospel throughout Israel.

Jesus' compassionate answer to the crowds is to send His disciples primarily to preach the gospel. The signs and healings are not the main mission. The gospel is the solution to our problems today as it was to Israel's problems when Jesus was there. Physical temporal suffering is not our main problem, and so physical healing is not the ultimate solution. The people who Jesus healed or even revived all eventually died. The healing was temporary, but it pointed people to Jesus as the source of eternal healing. He is the eternal solution, by which our spirits and bodies can be renewed. We are reminded to get our priorities straight. We often focus on our temporal issues more than spiritual problems. We pray to do well in school, to get into college, or to get better from sicknesses. While God can meet those needs, through Jesus He provides the solution to even deeper problems. When we pray for those who are sick, let us not stop at asking for healing. Let us also pray that their faith remains strong, even if the body fails. Endurance in faith is more important because it leads to the ultimate healing, the resurrection of our bodies through Jesus. Just as Israel waited for the Messiah's first coming, we wait for His second coming, when He will heal our broken bodies and restore this broken world. This Palm Sunday let us look back at Jesus' first coming and look forward longingly for His second. For He has the same compassion for us as He has for Israel, and we can be assured that He will fix everything when He comes.