

## **The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday**

*April 10, 2022*

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Palm Sunday has become a bit of a challenge.

Once upon a time—back in the olden days, which some of us still remember—Palm Sunday was primarily a celebration of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It marked the end of Lent's reflective season and the beginning of Holy Week: Maundy Thursday with the washing of feet, Good Friday with the Passion, the Great Vigil on Saturday, and finally, the joyful celebration of Easter morning.

However, as church practices changed, many people were no longer attending services on Good Friday and were missing out on the reading of the Passion. So, in its wisdom, a committee decided to move the Passion text onto Palm Sunday as a lead-in to Holy Week.

While this makes sense in some ways, it creates a challenge for preachers:

Do we focus on the triumphal entry or the Passion narrative?

Do we try to cover it all in ten minutes or less?

You'll be pleased to know that I won't attempt to do both or rush through a condensed sermon. Instead, I'd like to return to the original focus of Palm Sunday and take a closer look at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

(If you're interested in reflecting on the Passion narrative, I encourage you to attend our Good Friday services—details are in your bulletin.)

Let's set the scene:

In Jesus' time, Palestine was under Roman rule. The local religious authorities were allowed to continue their practices, as long as they didn't interfere with Roman law—and most importantly, as long as they didn't disrupt the collection of taxes.

So the people of Judea still had their Temple, their priests, their Passover rituals, and their sacrificial traditions. But they also bore the heavy burden of Roman oppression and taxation—on top of their religious tithes. Poverty and injustice were widespread.

In these conditions, the Jewish people turned to Scripture for hope, especially the prophetic writings of Isaiah that spoke of a Messiah—a king who would deliver them. Many began to see Jesus in this role: the liberator, the savior, the one who would cast out the Romans and restore the throne of David.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem during Passover, the city was crowded with pilgrims from across the region. He entered riding a young donkey, surrounded by crowds waving palm branches, shouting, "Hosanna! Save us!" They laid their cloaks on the road, celebrating what they believed was the arrival of a victorious leader.

Many probably expected Jesus to march to the palace or the Roman garrison, to challenge the ruling powers. But he didn't.

Why not?  
Why didn't Jesus lead a rebellion?

There are many scholarly interpretations, but I favor a simple one: Jesus knew that true power comes from God—not from weapons. That salvation comes from being in right relationship with God—not from political domination. That the Temple—the place of worship, repentance, and connection with God—is where true salvation begins. And so, that's where he went.

But the crowds didn't understand. Even his disciples, who had witnessed his teachings and miracles, didn't fully grasp it. And truthfully, many of us still don't.

We continue to look for salvation in political power, wealth, status, or influence. We hope that if we just pass the right law, or earn more, or build a solid retirement fund, we'll be secure. We think if we're good people, treat others well, and do our best, all will be well.

As many of you know, I spent the first 27 years of my career in the Foreign Service—immersed in worldly power. I walked the corridors of the United Nations, met with presidents, prime ministers, even a few princes. I negotiated multi-million-dollar agreements. I worked—often without success—to help resolve armed conflicts.

Throughout all of it, I tried to live a faithful life, to do good, to treat others with respect. I hoped I was doing the work God had given me.

But here's one truth I learned in all those years:  
Worldly power does not bring salvation.

Even the wealthiest must face illness.  
Even the law-abiding can encounter injustice.  
Even the most righteous can end up in poverty.

Salvation, reconciliation, and peace—they don't come from garrisons or palaces. They come from the place where humanity meets God.

That is the message of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. His teachings—of love, justice, and grace—begin in the Temple, in the community of faith, and are meant to be lived out in the world.

We draw the strength to work for justice, to strive for peace, and to uphold dignity—not from power or privilege—but from being in communion with God and with each other.

So today, as we sing “Hosanna” and wave our palms, let us remember:  
Jesus’ destination was not the battlefield, but the Temple.  
Not the throne, but the heart of our relationship with God.

Here—together—we find peace and reconciliation.  
And having received it, we are sent forth to carry it into the world.

**Amen.**