

Hosanna!
Seattle First Baptist Church
Palm Sunday April 9, 2017
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Matthew 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately."

This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion,

Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large **crowd** spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The **crowds** that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The **crowds** were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

The word of God for the people of God; Thanks, be to God.

Wow, Palm Sunday! What is not to like about Palm Sunday. We get these great slivers of greenery. We can fashion them into figures—a cross, dove, or a placemat if we have enough of them. We can tickle a friend, or have imaginary duels with our detractors. We can also let them dry and burn them for next year's Ash Wednesday use, or we can just look at them and remember how they were used over 2000 years ago when Jesus road into Jerusalem.

We know that at this point in Jesus' ministry, he was on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Even before Jesus got to Jerusalem, he knew things would not end well. In fact, according to Matthew's gospel, he told his trusted 12 disciples **three times** that he would be beaten, suffer at the hands of religious authorities, and be turned over to the Roman government to be crucified. Jesus knew things would not go well once he got to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he was determined to go.

There certainly have been occasions in recent history when men and women made choices for a greater good knowing the immediate consequences would be personally severe. Dr. Martin Luther King marched for civil rights. He was beaten, jailed, his home was bombed, dogs attacked him, and eventually he was murdered. Being a drum major for justice was personally costly, but we are a better country, and I am a better/ stronger woman, because of the nonviolent civil rights movement he led.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Malala Yousefzai, survived an attempted murder at age 15, all because she was an advocate for girls and education. She spoke up for rights of girls and women at great personal risk because it was the right thing to do. She said, "*all I want is education and I am afraid of no one. One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen, can change the world,*"—and she did.

Those who currently protest oil pipelines, the lowering of emission standards, and those who advocate for reproductive rights and Black Lives

Matter, do so today while risking personal safety. Yet they press on believing their actions will have a greater worldly good.

So, Jesus knew he would be in for a difficult time in Jerusalem. He tried to warn his disciples so they would be spiritually and mentally prepared, but they didn't want to hear of such things. Knowing the risk, Jesus headed toward Jerusalem. And as followers of Christ, our faith calls us to stand up for the marginalized when it would be much more comfortable to sit down. Our faith compels us to speak up when our introverted selves prefer silence. But silence is not an option in the face of pain and injustice. So, Jesus sent his followers to go get the donkey and colt that he would ride as he entered the Holy City.

Jesus already had a huge following. He had a reputation for healing the untouchables, casting out unclean spirits, and feeding multitudes of people. He welcomed children, acknowledged women, and spoke of forgiving not seven times as the law required, but seventy times seven.

A certain crowd wanted Jesus to be their long-anticipated King—their Messiah. Jesus was not interested in being the king they were looking for. Jesus was not interested in warring against the Roman government and religious authorities. That was not his purpose. That was not his calling. And, if we are not sure of our purpose in life, people will have us chasing after every windmill trying to turn us into what **they** want us to be instead of encouraging us to be what God wants us to be.

Jesus knew his purpose. He wanted to bring the kingdom of God/ the realm of God to God's people. Jesus wanted his followers to know the first shall be last and the last shall be first. He wanted the crowd to know there is healing for your diseases and forgiveness of sin. Jesus wanted everyone to know there is release for those held captive in their minds, and for those held captive in their hearts, and release for those held captive behind prison bars. Jesus wanted the crowd to know blessed are those who mourn for they have risked their hearts in loving and they will find comfort. Jesus wanted the crowd to know, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.

A king would have ridden into Jerusalem on a noble steed or a war horse. Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey and a colt. He rode them both so to fulfill the scriptures about the long awaited one riding **humbly** on a donkey and a colt. A king would have come arrogantly and with a grand entourage. Jesus came peacefully and humbly on a donkey, with a rag tag band of followers.

At the time of the Passover, pilgrims came from everywhere to Jerusalem and the city grew by tens of thousands. The city was accustomed to the thousands of pilgrims coming to Jerusalem and having them make provision along the way to celebrate the Passover. But, this year there was a different energy in the air. There was a new personality in town who knew the scriptures, but he wasn't one of the usual religious leaders. This Jesus spoke of God as if he knew God personally. The crowd loved Jesus and

shouted hosanna! “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” Jesus’ followers were so happy and excited. And, so it is when we first come to know Jesus for ourselves.

I call it that first fervor when you can’t get enough Jesus. Anyone besides me been there? Maybe you remember your first fervor when you shared your faith with other young people, or your co-workers, and friends. You would even talk to complete strangers about Jesus, and the neighbor’s cat too if she would sit still long enough. You would tell everybody just how good God is. In first fervor, you truly believe God can do anything but fail. (My story with the Four Spiritual Laws Tract)

Well the crowd was in first fervor pitch. But later in the week that first fervor was long gone. The challenge for us is to mature in our faith so that we don’t turn off people by our enthusiasm, but that we meet others where they are on their faith journey and then walk with them to a greater understanding of who God is for them. But for the Jerusalem pilgrims, being in the presence of Jesus was sheer joy on that Palm Sunday.

The regulars of Jerusalem were in turmoil over this newcomer who had a tremendous following. It is one thing to have one’s city overrun by pilgrims. It is another thing to have it taken over by noisy pilgrims that you don’t trust. And yes, when Jesus makes an entrance he will upset the status quo. And the very next day Jesus went to the Temple, over turned the merchants’ tables, and threw out the money changers. Dr. McKinney pastor emeritus of Mount Zion Baptist Church frequently said, Jesus was not crucified

because he said consider the lilies of the field and how they grow, but because he said consider the thieves and how they steal. You see when Jesus came into the city, or into our churches, into our homes, and even when he comes into our lives, he will shake things up. Amen.

As Jesus rode to Jerusalem, the crowd waved palms and laid their clothes on the road and cut branches from the trees to make Jesus' ride smoother from the ruts and potholes created by the thousands of travelers making their way to the Temple. The crowd wanted the son of Royalty to be as comfortable as possible on his journey. The crowd cheered and shouted for joy and waved their palms as Jesus rode by.

We don't have many palm trees in this part of the country. It is much too cold here. But palm trees and their branches have long been symbols of victory and peace. The Romans gave palm branches to their athletic champions and military officers after successful battles. So certainly, the symbolism of the palms was not lost on those first century residents of Jerusalem.

Palm trees are one of the strongest and most resilient plants in the world. They have been around at least 5,000 years. They can withstand hurricane force winds and not break. This is because of the flexibility of the fronds, branches, and the tree trunk. A palm tree can bend all the way to the ground and not break. Its leaves may get tattered and even torn, but the tree will survive. Palm trees can withstand the worst of times. And, God's love for us helps us withstand the worst of times. For God will never forsake us or leave us. And Palm Sunday reminds us that victory is ours.

So, if you are in a storm right now, wave your palm and shout **Hosanna!** The storm is passing over and victory is on the way. If you are searching for direction, **Hosanna!** Our God is a rock in a weary land. If you are struggling physically, **Hosanna!** We like to say in the Black church that God is the Great Physician who never lost a patient. If you are in trouble, shout **Hosanna** for our God is Lawyer who never lost a case. So, whatever you are going through, know that God is working it out for your benefit and so that God will be glorified.

*But, let us remember that trouble don't last always, as the gospel song says. We have the advantage of knowing that after every Good Friday experience, Resurrection Sunday is just hours away. So, hold on, don't give up on God! **Hosanna**, our God reigns. **Hosanna** in the highest heaven. Let all God's people say, **Hosanna!**