



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for March 28, 2021
“In His Steps: The Triumphant Entry”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: John 12:12-19

Everybody Loves a Parade

Everybody loves a parade. Thousands line the streets of New York City for the Macy Thanksgiving Day Parade. Pasadena, California is packed for the Tournament of Roses Parade on New Year’s Day. Around here we have the Kentucky Derby Festival Parade.

One of my favorite memories is from when the boys were much younger back when we were at Saint John before. Our whole family looked forward to the parade every year. Brian, John, and I would head to my mom and dad’s house, hop on a city bus there, and make our way downtown. We would meet Cheryl at Norton’s Hospital just as she was getting off work. It was a big adventure. Each year we stood along Broadway with thousands of others watching the floats, listening to the marching bands, and laughing at the clowns as they pass by.

Everybody loves a parade.

John 12:12-19

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!”

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

*“Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;
see, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey’s colt.”*

At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

Reason for Celebration

The week of Christ’s death began with him making a triumphant entry. It was a parade of a different sort, filled with all sorts of meaning.

It was Passover Week and people from all over flooded into the Holy City of Jerusalem. It was thought that every righteous Jew needed to celebrate the Passover at least once in the Holy City. There was always a lot going on in Jerusalem during Passover. People not only took in the sights and sounds but engaged in whatever was going on.

As Christ entered Jerusalem people were all astir to catch a glimpse. They wanted to engage in the parade that was now forming. The news about Jesus had spread far and wide. His reputation preceded him. His teachings had transformed a lot of people. The signs and wonders he performed demonstrated the power of God. In fact, just before entering Jerusalem Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. That caught everybody's attention.

The people gathered there were ready to celebrate Christ. They shouted and, yes, I said shouted. They were that excited. *"Hosanna!" Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!"*

They were of the mind that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah promised centuries before. No wonder they were ready to celebrate.

I wonder:

- How ready we are to celebrate Christ?
- How is that sort of thing playing out in your life?
- How excited are you about Jesus?
- And how is that excitement or lack thereof reflected in the way you live your life?

You and I ought to be shouting, if not literally, then with a heart that is dancing with joy. *"Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord! Thank God, Jesus has come, and he is a part of my life."*

Such praise has a way of warming our hearts and gives us pause to genuinely celebrate his presence.

The couple of times I have had the privilege to visit Africa I have been overwhelmed by the celebrating that goes on when the people worship. They really go to it. What they do is loud and boisterous. There are a lot of instruments—drums, tambourines, bells, even an iron circle that when hit with a stick makes a clanging sound. It's really quite something. The people there are unashamed in their celebration of Christ, and we should be as well.

King David was that way. In II Samuel 6 he leapt and danced before the Lord as the Ark of the Covenant entered the City of David. When Michal, the daughter of King Saul called him on it, he exclaimed, *"I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this."* II Samuel 6:22

Run Aground

It is easy to get caught up in the crowd for good and for bad. We do that all the time. It is easy to get caught up in the flow of what is going on around us if we don't have a sense of where we are going.

We have all looked on with amazement at the plight of the 200,000-ton container ship nearly a quarter of a mile long that ran aground in the Suez Canal Tuesday morning. Fierce winds and a sandstorm made visibility tough. The vessel is now wedged across the canal preventing any other ships from passing by, and it is going to take a while to get it freed.

We too will run aground if we let the prevailing winds that blow around us dictate the course we take.

Caught Up in the Crowd

Aside from the those who earnestly wanted to offer their praise to Christ as he entered Jerusalem, there were a lot of others who simply just got caught up in the crowd. I have always thought that many of the same people who shouted their "*hosannas*" early in the week were some of the same people who shouted later in the week, "*Crucify him, crucify him.*"

We are sort of fickle that way. If we are not well-grounded in what we believe we should not be surprised when we find ourselves all over the place when it comes to our life in Christ. We live in the tension of wanting to praise Christ, while holding on to the things of the world and the sway those things have upon our lives.

Jesus offers every opportunity for us to get ourselves righted. The cross all but seals it. While we might not be guilty of shouting, "*crucify him, crucify him,*" our sinful ways are the very reason Jesus went to the cross.

Thank God that through the cross Jesus paves the way for our salvation.

The Rhythm of Holy Week

Today is a day for loud, "*Hosannas.*" We praise Christ for who he is and what he is doing in our lives.

The week ahead though changes drastically in tone and focus, just as it did the last week of Christ's life. In effect, we move from celebration to sorrow. All too quickly, we swing from excitement and jubilation to the more serious consideration of sin and death. That is not just the way it is, but the way it was. Such is the rhythm of Holy Week.

That shift is almost more than we can comprehend. It is hard to come to grips with the ebb and flow of this week. Talk about an emotional rollercoaster.

So many leave Palm Sunday and move right to Easter without ever really considering what is in between. Attendance at Easter is always larger than Good Friday. We will never really get it if all we do is consider the triumph of Easter. Without Friday, there is no Sunday to celebrate.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Let's celebrate today. Praise is good for the soul.

Let's resolve though to meet each day of this week as it comes—in our worship, in our prayers, in our study of God's Word, in our every contemplation of the great things God has done in his Son, Jesus Christ.

A King of a Different Sort

Those who greeted Jesus as he entered Jerusalem picked up palm branches, waved them his direction, and laid them down carpeting the road before him. The scene was fit for a king, save in Christ's case, he was a king of a different sort.

Jesus rode in on the back of a donkey. He knew exactly what he was doing. The donkey was a symbol of humility and peace and fulfilled a centuries old prophecy offered by the prophet Zechariah.

“Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.” Zechariah 9:9

Jesus was a Prince of Peace. Those looking for a conquering hero had to look elsewhere. If Jesus was a conqueror, he was a conqueror over sin and death and, in that sense, the greatest conqueror to have ever lived. Those who followed him would understand that, but not until after his death and resurrection.

Palms Give Way to Ashes

Today, we wave palms in celebration of the one *“who comes in the name of the Lord.”* Blessed be his holy name.

The interesting thing about palms is that the church has also used palms to point us to the cross. Each year the palms are supposed to be dried out and then burned to form the ashes used in the next year’s Ash Wednesday Service. I have tried to do that many times and it always ends up a mess. I trust the people at Tonini’s to do a much better job.

Think of it, palms of celebration and triumph eventually lead us to consider the sorrow and ensuing triumph of the cross. Such is the rhythm of Holy Week. Let’s commit then to living each and every moment of this week seeking to hear from God and, by so doing, responding with our very lives.

How Will You Respond?

So, how will you respond?

Years ago, Clarence Jordan, author of the *Cotton Patch Bible* and founder of Koinonia Farm in Americus, Georgia, got a red-carpet tour of a brand-new sanctuary by a local pastor.

The pastor of the church took great pride pointing out all the church had done and how much the church had spent. As the two stepped outside the pastor pointed out a huge cross on top of a mighty steeple.

“That cross alone cost \$10,000,” said the pastor.

“You got cheated,” said Jordan. *“Times were when people could get the cross free of charge.”*

Jordan’s right, the cross is free for all, even though it cost God severely.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,” says John in John 3:16.

Make no mistake about it, the cross is God’s gift to you. Even though the world has tried, there is no hiding the cross. There are no sweeping things under the rug. The cross stands as testimony to the love of God and the lengths he will go to win us back.

That is why this week is so special. It gives us opportunity to not only celebrate but contemplate the great thing God has done.