

Pastor Jon's Livestream sermon from Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020.

“Donkey King”

Palm Sunday just isn't the same without all of you... waving our palms, and shouting Hosanna.

I couldn't believe it at first when I heard it, but I learned that Our Savior's hires a live Donkey each year for the procession of the palms. I was really looking forward to this “Donkey Walk”.

Palm Sunday and Good Friday were always my most memorable worship services as a kid. On Palm Sunday, I got to parade around the church proudly waving my palm branches. Then on Good Friday, I remember the church being dark and a black cloth covered the cross. I recall falling asleep because of the long Gospel reading. And then being abruptly wakened by the slamming of the book.

Today in church we have a mash-up of both of these days... Palm/Passion Sunday... where you have Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his passion story. I believe the Lectionary writers wanted to include the passion reading on Palm Sunday because many people didn't attend the Good Friday worship during Holy Week.

You see, Easter loses its power without the journey through the cross. You can't just go from triumph on Palm Sunday to triumph at Easter. We live in a Good Friday world. We have loss and grief. We need to know God is with us right now in all of this. As Lutheran Christians our identity is tied to the cross and Jesus' crucifixion... not just in the glorious moments. The cross reveals God's complete presence with us in times of pain and suffering. It reminds me of the phenomenon of Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ* in February of 2004. This was in our post 9/11 world and people were searching for something to cling to other than themselves and the economy. Do you remember, theaters were full around Easter? Whole church groups would go to the movie. In the *Passion of the Christ*, you could visually see and feel Christ's suffering and pain through Mel's artistic

interpretation. You walked away wondering, what wondrous love is this?

We need to hear the story of Jesus' passion more than ever this year. We need to know that God is with us as we struggle and many suffer to survive Covid-19.

Jesus' last week starts with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Here, Jesus intentionally plans a parade. He vetted the area already. He told the disciples where to get the donkey. This wasn't just any kind of parade. I read in a book, "*The Last Week*" by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, that Jesus was staging a counter-protest to Rome's triumphal entry that same day. During the Passover, Pontius Pilate, the Roman Tetrarch of that region, would come in the name of emperor from the East in a military style parade to Jerusalem. Not so much to participate in the Jewish religious festivities, but to put forth a show of power and to keep order as the population of Jerusalem would swell. He needed to make sure there were no riots and maintain that the false image of peace, the Pax Romana (Peace of Rome), was fully intact. Pilate would come with horses, chariots, soldiers, and pomp and circumstance.

Jesus' parade, on the other hand came, from the west... from the Mount of Olives, down through the Kidron Valley, to Jerusalem. Instead of a horse (a military animal), Jesus rode a donkey (A working animal). Royalty riding a donkey is a sign of humility. Matthew reminds his primarily Jewish audience of Zechariah's prophecy 9:9 about a good king who will come to save the people, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

In the processional people waved palm branches and threw their cloaks on the road as Jesus entered Jerusalem. This was their version of the Hollywood red carpet. They shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." This must have been quite a site.... Jesus, the Donkey King.

Hosanna means “save now or save us, we pray.” The image here is Jesus as king... from the line of David. David was the greatest Jewish King of all time for the Jews. The Messiah was to come from David’s line and free the Jewish People from the Roman Occupation. People longed for a savior. The crowds called Jesus “Lord”... a term reserved by the Romans for the Emperor along with Son of God. A clash was coming within the Empire.

Jesus’ kingdom would not be ruled with military might, but with love and servanthood. In our first lesson from Isaiah 50, we have what is called the 3rd Servant Song. This image is of a suffering servant, who as a teacher will listen to the plight of the people and seek justice for their cause. The teacher will listen to his students. The servant will be struck, insulted, and spit at, and yet believe God would deliver him from his enemies. As Christians, we see Jesus in these servant images.

In those days, Jesus and his followers were considered outsiders. The city dwellers lived inside the city walls and the outsiders were from places like Nazareth in Galilee. This community was already practicing social distancing... but in a bad way. People kept their distance because of social and political differences. So to hear the outsiders shouting Hosanna to the Son of David, people would have poked their heads out their windows to see what was going on. Matthew said Jesus’ entry caused turmoil in the city. It wouldn’t stop here, Jesus would go to the Jewish Temple to call out the injustices and exploitative business practices of the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus would turn over the tables of the money changers.

So here’s the deal, church. The one we follow listened to the people and came to their aid. He suffered on our behalf. I know many of you are out there doing what you can for others at a safe distance. There are so many great ideas out there on how to support those on the front lines, to make masks, to encourage others through sidewalk chalk or window art. In the midst of trying to support those who are working, on unemployment, or staying at home, we need to listen. Things are being exposed right

now that should be. Hoarders of vital medical equipment are being caught. Workers who feel their pay or working conditions aren't sufficient are organizing. People are speaking truth to power.

The word Passion means to suffer for something you love. Imagine how much God loves us to send Jesus into the world to love us and forgive us. What do you love so much that you are willing to suffer for it? May God lead us and guide us in our vocations these days. May we stand with those who need our support right now.

Your assignment this week is to send pictures or images of love and resurrection with permission to share. I will incorporate them into worship this week. Send them to jstrasman@our-saviors.org.