

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday: Holy Trinity Church: April 10, 2022

Luke 19:28-40: Palm Sunday and His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

My sisters and brothers, seven days changed the world. These seven days have been the topic of a million of publications, countless debates, and thousands of films. These seven days have inspired the greatest painters, the most skilled architects, and the most gifted musicians. To try and calculate the cultural impact of these seven days is impossible. But harder still would be an attempt to account for the lives of men and women who have been transformed by them. And yet these seven days as they played out in Jerusalem were of little significance to anyone, but a few people involved. What happened on those seven days? During the next seven Sundays of Lent and Easter we will look at these seven days in depth but for now let's summarize:

1. On Sunday the first of the seven days, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to the shouts of Hosanna, fulfilling an old prophecy in Zechariah 9:9.

2. On Monday, the second of the seven days, Jesus walked into the Jerusalem Temple overturning tables where money exchange occurred, Roman drachmas were being exchanged for Jewish shekels. Roman coins were not allowed. The image of Caesar was a violation of the second commandment. But the Temple authorities were using the Commandment as means to cheat the people and making the Temple a place of profit rather than a place of prayer.

3. On Tuesday the third of the seven days, Jesus taught in parables, warned the people against the Pharisees, and predicted the destruction of the Temple.

4. On Wednesday, the fourth day, we know nothing. The Gospel writers are silent. Perhaps it was a day of rest for him and his weary and worried disciples.

5. On Thursday, the fifth day of the seven days, in an upper room, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. But he gave it a new meaning. No longer would his followers remember the Exodus from Egypt in the breaking of bread. They would remember his broken body and shed blood. Later that evening in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus agonized in prayer and sweats blood at what lay ahead for him.

6. On Friday, the sixth day of the seven days, following betrayal, arrest, imprisonment, desertion, false trials, denial, condemnation, beatings and sentencing, Jesus carried his own cross to “The Place of the Skull,” where he was crucified with two other prisoners.

7. On Saturday, seventh day of the seven days, Jesus lay dead in a tomb bought by a rich man named Joseph Arithimea.

8. On Sunday, his Passion was over, the stone had been rolled away. Jesus was alive. He appeared to Mary, to Peter, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and to the 11 disciples gathered in a locked room. His resurrection was established as a fact.

Back then these seven days were called Passover, as it is still called today by the Jews. Christians around the world know these seven days as Holy Week, the Passion of the Christ. In our culture the emotion, the pain, and the passion of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ has been lost. Let me tell you what I mean on Good Friday. Let’s turn now to how it begins. It was Sunday the first day in Passover. Jesus is preparing to make his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It was a strange kind of a day, a day of contrasts: of climax and anti-climax, of fulfillment and frustration; of hosannas and tears, of tragedy and triumph.

First let's look at why Palm Sunday was a tragedy. Excitement was running high in the city as it always did at the time of such festivals as the Passover. But the natural excitement was heightened by this procession, this strange entourage that wound its way toward the city gates. There at the head rode a quiet figure of a man on a donkey. All about him the crowds gathered, curious at first, but soon they were shouting and singing and turning the place upside down for him.

As he entered the ancient city the crowds went wild with cheering. There were shouts of, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord". People grabbed anything they could get their hands on. They tore palm branches from trees. They tore the clothes off their back. They threw them in his path as a king of regal carpet. The shouts of hosanna, which meant "save now," grew louder. The green palms waved more and more frantically. Something tremendous was about to happen.

Singing, shouting confidently, the crowd, swept through the city gates and finally stopped on the plaza in front of the Temple, the most sacred of shrines. There, Jesus dismounted. What a fitting and appropriate place for Jesus to make his big move. The crowd, tense with anticipation, watched his every move now. Some of them would glanced toward heaven, looking for the sign

that was sure to come. After all, was this not the Messiah, the Chosen One, for whom legends of angels would descend from heaven and reestablish the Kingdom of Israel.

Can we possibly even imagine the sensation that these people were feeling. We might compare it to the allied armies marching victoriously into Paris and throwing off the cruel yoke of Nazi oppression. Jesus was a one-man liberation army that had marched right into the heart of Jerusalem in the midst of these poor troubled people groveling under the yoke of pagan Rome. This was the moment that had kept their faith alive throughout the centuries. This had been their hope; this moment had been the inspiration of their worship. They saw Jesus as the right man for the right time. Then the moment that everyone had been waiting for came. Jesus entered the temple. The crowd grew faint, only a low murmuring now as all eyes focused upon the Nazarene. Time passed. More time passed. An uneasy restlessness came over the crowd. What was Jesus going to do? Just so we can keep the record straight I will read to you what Jesus did as it was recorded verbatim from the Gospel of St. Mark. Jesus went into the temple, and when he looked around at everything, since the hour was already late, he went out again,” And as they say, that’s it, there ain’t no more. He went into the Temple, looked around, turned, and walked back out. Jesus did absolutely nothing.

The crowd was stunned. Perhaps no event in history has built up to a greater anti-climax than Palm Sunday. Then, slowly, one by one, the crowd began to melt away. All that was left was this kind of eerie silence and this empty feeling in their heart. That was the end of their singing and shouting, the hosannas, the waving of palms. Something quite obviously had failed to come off here. It was a tremendous buildup to an equally tremendous let down.

In the centuries of retelling the story of Palm Sunday, it seems to me that we so often miss the point that to the people of first century Palestine the events of that day fell like one big thud. In their eyes, Jesus had failed to exploit this one great moment in history. And yes, many of them must have felt betrayed. One by one they began to leave the scene, terribly disillusioned with the one whom they thought would be their exalted leader.

You see my brothers and sister in Christ, the crowds wanted a winner; Jesus has other plans. And this my friends are the tragedy of Palm Sunday and it sets the tone for what we now call his Passion. There are two expectations being played out. Two storylines are occurring: the hopes of the people are one and the Passion of the Christ is the other. Jesus could not match his hopes and dreams with theirs. The two goals were mutually exclusive. To pursue a

king's crown would defeat the purpose of the cross. To pursue a sacrificial cross would preclude any chance at a crown.

The Passion. What does it mean? Why do we call it the Passion? Well you must go back several years to the old meaning of the word. At one time the word meant the sufferings of a martyr. So quite simply it means the Sufferings of the Christ.

So here Jesus stands before this throng of people who are looking to him for leadership. They have just celebrated a kind of King's reception with the donkey, the palm branches, throwing their robes to the ground in humble subjection to this king. And Jesus knows he must disappoint them. He knows he must walk away, or they will try to follow through with the ceremonies and pronounce him king. So, begins the sufferings, or the Passion, of the Christ. The crowds will begin to turn against him because of their disappointment over this incident. And for that reason, Palm Sunday was not a His Triumph but His Tragedy.

But Palm Sunday was a triumph. Here's why: Palm Sunday marked the triumph of love over hate; because what was expected was war, but what mankind received was sacrifice. It marked the victory of God in human affairs. God's affairs triumphed over human affairs. Listen to me for a

moment, man cannot reach up to God, so in grace God comes down to where human beings are. He is not above it all but in the midst of it all. And because of his presence among us, there is forever a triumph of love over hate, of life over death.

I am going to tell you a challenging story about what Palm Sunday is about in the 21st Century. Several years ago, Newsweek magazine carried the story of the memorial service held for Hubert Humphrey, former vice-president of the United States. Hundreds of people came from all over the world to say good-bye to their old friend and colleague. But one person who came was shunned and ignored by virtually everyone there. Nobody would look at him much less speak to him. That person was former president Richard Nixon. Not long before, he had gone through the shame and infamy of Watergate. He was back in Washington for the first time since his resignation from the presidency.

Then a very special thing happened, perhaps the only thing that could have made a difference and broken the ice. President Jimmy Carter, who was in the White House at that time, came into the room. Before he was seated, he saw Nixon over against the wall, all by himself. He went over to Nixon as though he were greeting a family member, stuck out his hand to the former president, and smiled broadly. To the surprise of everyone there, the two of

them embraced each other, and Carter said, "Welcome home, Mr. President! Welcome home! "Commenting on that, Newsweek magazine asserted, "If there was a turning point in Nixon's long ordeal in the wilderness, it was that moment and that gesture of love and compassion."

My sisters and brothers, the turning point for us is Palm Sunday. It is our moment of triumph. It was a triumph because God's Son Jesus decided to ignore our miserable state and act on our behalf. He chose to ignore the crowd's version of Palm Sunday and go with His. No matter what we have done: compromised our principles, sold out to the expediency of the moment, given in to sin. God comes into our world and welcomes us home. We may not deserve to be there, but Jesus welcomes us just the same. If there ever was a turning point of our long ordeal in the wilderness. This is it! Amen.