

PALM SUNDAY

**11 As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, on the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 2 and told them, “Go into the village ahead of you. As soon as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it, and he will send it back here without delay.’” 4 They left and found a colt in the street, tied at a door; and they untied it. 5 Some who were standing there asked them, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” 6 The disciples answered them just as Jesus had instructed them, and the men let them go. 7 They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their garments on it, and Jesus sat on it. 8 Many people spread their garments on the road. Others spread branches that they had cut from the fields. 9 Those who went in front and those who followed were crying out, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!**

The Prophet Zechariah took a long hard look at the new brickwork of Jerusalem’s wall, and the work being done in the big, mostly empty courtyard of the temple. Zechariah, his fellow prophet Haggai, the priest Ezra and the administrator Nehemiah had done everything they could to help Zerubbabel the leader of Judah to rebuild Jerusalem and Judea after the people returned from their exile: Homes, wells, walls, towers, temple, and gates. And now this! The Lord had given Zechariah a prophecy about the Messiah—the King, the Son of David! No wonder the Lord had put these words into a prophecy, for who would believe the event without it? A king coming, bringing salvation-- but humble? And riding on a donkey?

Five hundred years later, on a spring morning, the day after the Sabbath, a man and his family were getting ready for the day-- the children were going to be sent off to school, and the man’s wife was handing him his cold lunch in a basket, when two men just walked up and started untying their female donkey and her foal. “Hey! What are you doing, untying that colt?” the man said, almost more amused than upset. What kind of idiotic horse thieves would try to steal a mount in broad daylight with the owner ten feet away? One of the horse thieves looked up. Maybe his face was familiar? But he said, “The Lord needs it, but he’ll send it right back.”

This had begun as a pretty good day, but if Jesus the Lord needed something from this man, it was going to be the best day ever! He had wanted to offer Jesus something, anything! Stay at my house, if you like! But of course Jesus always stayed with his friend Lazarus. And the man didn’t mind; friends are friends, after all. But Jesus wanted the donkey and the colt. Take them!

Anything for Jesus! In fact, he thought as he looked at his family-- maybe we'll go along and see!

Ten disciples of Jesus were waiting at the edge of the village. They were in awe of Jesus, as usual, about this little miracle of either foreknowledge or secret prearrangement (most of them never figured out which it was). But here came the other disciples leading the two animals. And just as Jesus was about to climb on the one, they stopped him, as if they all had the very same thought. Off came their cloaks, and then Jesus had a gorgeous, colorful, plush saddle. Twelve robes would have been too much, and so most of them laid their robes down in the pathway. The people of the village were gathering around by this time-- word traveled fast. And Jesus was on his way.

Sometimes we are more like the other people in the city than we are like the people who went out and cheered. Sometimes our sins and our temptations turn our faces away from Christ our King. Sometimes we just plain fail to love—to love God, or to love one another. We don't do what God would have us do.

Now, sinner, as you and I are hurt, deeply hurt, to know that, to be reminded of that, don't think that you have missed the Parade, or that Jesus pushes you out as he rides in. No! Not at all! You are the one he CAME FOR. You are the ending point, the stopping point of this Parade of our King as he rides on his donkey. Those very sins of yours that trouble you. The ones that maybe you don't even want to confess when you pray, those dark sins you try to hide in a cupboard in your mind when you fold your hands and bow your head. Don't imagine that he doesn't know! He knows that they trouble you, that they break your heart. He came to forgive those sins, too.

So cheer up! Rejoice! It is not just anyone, some random stranger, who puts a palm branch in your hand and teaches you to say, "Hosanna!" It is Jesus himself!

He invites our praise  
because he came to be raised  
on a cross of shame to end his days  
Until he was raised  
In Glory. All for you.<sup>1</sup>

That is why he came. If Jesus had come to take over the government of Jerusalem, why would he come on a mama donkey with her foal tied behind? Why would he risk the indignity of letting his feet drag on the ground? Could they even be sure that this was their Savior?

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<sup>1</sup> These lines came spontaneously and accidentally to my mind while writing—a little burst of verse..

Zechariah's prophecy told the people that this was indeed their Savior. This was Christ. He didn't come at all like a king. It was as if the prophet was guiding the people, warning and comforting them at the same time: "You, believer, don't be confused, or disappointed, or afraid. Even though your Messiah will make his entry on the back of a donkey, in such a lowly, humble fashion, he will be received with royal honors! So get ready! When you see him on that donkey, with a handful, maybe, of worshipers—just his disciples and a couple of people from Bethany and that little, tiny village of Bethphage—grab a handful of palm branches! Get ready to praise him! Don't miss him, so that he weeps over the city or condemns it! Get out there and welcome him!"

"Hosanna!" they said. It was a worship word that had maybe wandered away from its original meaning, which was "Save us, please!" But it was still a word for praise, the way many of us say "Hallelujah" without knowing or remembering what it really means. It's okay, We use it to praise God, and he knows that. It comes from Psalm 118, where the Psalm says, "Lord, save us!" And in the Psalm, this is followed by the very next thing the people said: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," verse 26.

That Psalm pointed to the coming of Christ, so what better words to use when Christ came? They followed it with, "Blessed is the coming of our Father David!" The Messiah was going to be descended from David, and the Scriptures tell us that Jesus was indeed descended from the line of King David.<sup>2</sup>

With these things in mind, the people welcomed Jesus as their Savior. Many or most of them would grieve terribly when the news spread later that week that Jesus had been arrested and crucified. But there was better news to come—so much better, a week after this Psalm Sunday, on Easter.

We are saved by faith in Jesus our Lord. What blessings we receive from him!

Some of you children or families may have kept a palm branch, and you have one with you now. You're welcome to come up to the baskets right after church and take one home with you. When you do, or right now if you like, count the number of leaves on your palm branch. Think about that number for a moment.

When I was a young man, when some of my friends thought that they had found the right girl for them, would take a daisy in the spring time and pull off its petals, saying after each one, "She loves, she loves me not." Or a girl would say, "He loves me, he loves me not." Since a daisy has 15 to 30 petals, You didn't know which way it would end.

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<sup>2</sup> Both through David's son Solomon (Matthew 1:6) and through another of David's sons, Nathan (Luke 3:31).

Now—take your palm branch, and don't pull off the leaves, but repeat after me, only one phrase, not two: "He loves me, he loves me, he loves me, he loves me," all the way around the branch. It's a way of counting your blessings.

He loves me by giving me my mom. He loves me by giving me my dad. My brother. My sister. My best friend Charlie. My wife. My children. My job. A place to live—things like that take us up to the top.

But then on the way back down, we count our spiritual blessings. He gave me my baptism and washed my sins away. He gave me my faith. He gave me his Word in the Bible. He blessed me with Martin Luther and his Catechism to teach me Christian doctrine. He blessed me with my Christian teachers, with the Lord's Supper, and with this palm branch to remember his blessings day by day.

Amen

*The Psalm for Psalm Sunday, Psalm 118, also ends with words we use to conclude many of our prayers. Those words remind us that part of our stewardship is the stewardship of our faith, of our trust in Christ.*

*The words are "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His mercy endures forever."*

*Say them with me: "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His mercy endures forever."  
Amen.*