

Palm Sunday

April 5, 2020



Introduction

Today, we encounter the paradox that defines our faith: Jesus Christ is glorified king and humiliated servant. We wave palms in celebration today as Christ comes into our midst, and we follow with trepidation as his path leads to death on the cross. We begin this week that stands at the center of the church year, anticipating the completion of God's astounding work.

Blessing of the Palms

We praise you, O God, for redeeming the world through our Savior Jesus Christ. Today he entered the holy city in triumph and was proclaimed messiah and king by those who spread garments and branches along his way. As we gather in our homes without palm branches this year, help us to know it isn't about the green vegetation, but about our hands that do your will. Bless the palms of our hands and help us to love the world as you have loved us. Grant us grace to follow our Lord in the way of the cross, so that, joined to his death and resurrection, we enter into life with you; through the same Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Hymn of the Day

All Glory, Laud, and Honor

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

Everlasting God, in your endless love for the human race you sent our Lord Jesus Christ to take on our nature and to suffer death on the cross. In your mercy enable us to share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Epistle: Philippians 2:5-11

Paul uses an early Christian hymn to help us comprehend Jesus' obedient selflessness on the cross and how God has made Christ lord over all reality. The perspective of the cross becomes the way we rightly understand God, Christ, our own lives, and fellowship within the community of Christ.

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel: John 12:12-19

Soon after raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus enters Jerusalem.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Today is the beginning of Holy Week. This year, it is a bit different because we cannot be together, and we cannot wave our palm branches as we process around the church. We do still hear the story of Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem, but this year, as things are different, we are hearing a different version of this story as we use John's Gospel throughout Holy Week.

In John's Gospel, the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem occurs shortly after the raising of Lazarus. Many in the crowd are same people who watched Jesus raise Lazarus and have walked with him from Bethany. Others are the ones who have heard about Jesus raising Lazarus and are waiting for him as he enters the city. Only in John's Gospel are the green branches actually identified as palms. The palm leaves are markers of victory and celebration. This is the most triumphant entry into Jerusalem of all the gospel accounts. Jesus leads a three-mile parade that grows and grows as he reaches Jerusalem. Shouts of Hosanna greet him all along the way. Jesus performs his greatest sign to date in John's Gospel as he raises Lazarus and is greeted as a hero.

In John's Gospel, the Pharisees who are watching are not plotting against Jesus but are dismayed at how jubilant the crowds are. They are not sure how they are going to overcome his popularity.

Even as Jesus enter the Holy City to shouts and cheers, we know what is coming. Those same people who wave and shout as he enters, will later in the week be shouting, "Crucify him!" How could they turn on him so quickly?

This same Jesus, who enter the city to shouts of joy, will soon be accused and tried. This same Jesus of whom Paul writes, "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Holy Week is a time for us to contemplate Jesus' journey to the cross, even as we hear the story again. It is a time for us to realize that we, too, are complicit in Jesus death, for it is for the sake of the world, for our sake, that Jesus allows himself to be arrested and crucified.

We move from Palm Sunday, through Maundy Thursday, and to Good Friday, always remembering that without Jesus death, there would be no resurrection. Without Jesus death, there would be no Easter Sunday. Without Jesus death and resurrection, there would be no hope for us. Without Jesus, we are just mere mortals, doomed to die. With Jesus, with his death and his resurrection, the fear of death is conquered, and we have hope.

Jesus enters to shouts of Hosanna. We cheer along with the crowds! There is hope as they cheer and shout, but it is a hope for earthly things. We know better. We know that Jesus enters to the city not in celebration of a victory of life, but to celebrate the coming victory over death.

This is good news for us, especially in this day and time as we stay home, distance ourselves from others, and watch the news as new cases of the virus are tested and counted. The news is not good, but the Good News is that Jesus is in control; even as he enters Jerusalem and prepares to be betrayed, we know that Jesus will overcome betrayal; that Jesus will overcome lies and deceit; that Jesus will overcome death. Thanks be to God.

Hymn of the Day

Palm Sunday Lament

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

**He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.**

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

For the layers of comfort and convenience that surrounded our lives and that we never considered a blessing but always just took for granted, forgive us.

For we who must grieve in isolation and not in community, comfort us.

For we who care for the sick, protect us.

For the ability to turn off the fear-mongering and unhelpful commentary and worst-case scenario click bait, strengthen us.

For the times when we are all out of creative ideas for how to get through this with cooped up kids, inspire us.

For we who are now cutting our own bangs at home, guide us.

For the grace to allow ourselves and others to just be less productive, shower us.

For the generosity needed from those of us who have more resources, empower us.

From our own selfish inclinations, deliver us.

For just being your children, none of whom have done a global pandemic before, love us.

For the days ahead, accompany us.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God unbound by time, help us to know that you are already present in the future we are fearing. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn

Ride On in Majesty

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ray Sipe.

Prayers for Blessing of the Palms was written by Pastor Jerry Whirtley.

Prayers were written by Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber.

Palm Sunday Lament is a new composition by Pastor David Eck.