

Text:

Theme: Living Lent - Palms

March 20, 2015

Today is Palm Sunday, the day that reminds us of a parade in our hometown—Right down the center of Main Street, complete with bands, floats, dignitaries and sirens all finding their place in the procession. Moms and dads, grandparents, people from all parts of the community, and curious onlookers line the sidewalks and curbs. Children are everywhere. They can't sit still, although parents are trying their best to keep them contained. Some kids are playing chase in the street before the parade starts; others are excitedly talking to their friends about how much candy they will get today. Finally—the parade begins, and, in our minds, we can almost see Professor Harold Hill and librarian Marion Paroo leading 76 trombones in joy and exuberance!

Let's face it! Who doesn't love a parade? Where else do you get to stand in the rain for two hours to catch a thirty-second glimpse of your daughter playing the flute in the marching band ... or your son carrying the flag for the Boy Scouts, or your grandson on the football float? Parades are what Americans do as we celebrate holidays and hometown spirit.

But today's parade, our Palm Sunday parade, is different. There are no marching bands, no decorated floats or clowns throwing candy to kids along the streets. There's no homecoming court or queen, no parade marshal waving from a sporty convertible, no old cars or old tractors.

To be sure, this is a different kind of parade... a poor man's parade at best comprised of palm branches cut down from the nearby trees, cloaks thrown on the road and beggars lining the streets, wide-eyed with excitement, nearly as excited as kids at our parades. Royalty will be in this parade—not one elected by popular vote or dynasty, but one who comes riding on the back of a donkey. This pre-arranged mode of transportation and the procession into Jerusalem remind the crowds of the stories of King David's victory parades, when he, too, would ride on a donkey as a sign of humility before God. Could it be that this humble carpenter from a nowhere place like Nazareth would be the "new David," the long-awaited Messiah?

Here comes Jesus ... and how the crowd shouts, "Hosanna! Son of David! Save us! Deliver us!" These innocent-looking crowds, these beggars who don't even realize how desperate they really are—with palms waving and voices shouting—offer a glimpse of a revolution. Reflecting and contemplating Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, one senses the irony of it all. The Romans, the local ruling power, have increased their security forces to maintain order during the Passover Festival. Isn't it just like the powerful to keep the powerless in their place ... safe from disturbing what was perceived as peace? But here comes Jesus, a "picture" of powerlessness as he rides a donkey under the very noses of the Roman soldiers!

Today, when we wave our palms and shout hosanna to the Son of David, we are participating in a subversive act. We are boldly claiming that JESUS is LORD and KING ... and that power, money, military force, or government are NOT! The parade

of palms that we remember and re-enact is not a flowery yearly ritual, but a revolutionary statement, a declaration made by a band of beggars, declaring the lordship of Jesus. As we mentally hold high the palms and wave them as beggars would wave them, we are saying in our hearts, "Jesus is Lord of MY life!" And, in doing so, we become part of a movement where we boldly profess that Jesus IS the way, the truth and the life. And it is all because of this carpenter named Jesus.

So what kind of King is this Jesus? What kind of a revolutionary parade invites our participation, the participation of those who are surely little more than unworthy beggars? And what does this kingdom look like? It's so tempting to mold or remold Jesus into anything or anyone that works for us, that suits our needs. We have our pre-conceived notions about what to expect from Jesus realistic or unrealistic. But Jesus, our Lord and King, promptly turns the tables on us. He is God's grand reversal.

How? Instead of demanding obedience, He washes the feet of his disciples. Instead of sitting among only the scholarly, He invites himself to a despised tax collector's home. He takes a drink of water from a disgraced and disregarded woman at the well. He breaks the law by healing on the Sabbath. He is whipped and scourged, mocked and beaten, denied, betrayed and abandoned, and nailed to the cross for claiming he was the Son of God.

Is this the king for whom we wave our palms?

There is a cost to following this Jesus. The ego-gratifying shouts of "Hosanna, hosanna to the Son of David," become the heart-wrenching, "Crucify him, crucify him! ... We have no king but Caesar!" in the course of less than a week's time.

Yet, even in the face of this ugliness and abandonment, there is a love that will win. This love is the love of Jesus who sees us at our worst, knows we are little more than unworthy beggars, yet still goes to the cross, redeeming the world with his love.

What kind of king rides a donkey into Jerusalem? The king who later wears a crown of thorns stuck into his brow; his throne, a cross; his fine wine, vinegar. This King of Kings is nothing the world has ever seen before—this king is all about the power of redemptive love ... the kind of love that offers us a glimpse of God's kingdom.

We continue this parade of paradox in a few days as we experience the deep love of Jesus as we gather in the Upper Room and celebrate his Feast of Love ... a love that did not pass over us ... but a love that gets inside us. From there we will take a walk to a garden called Gethsemane and pray with Jesus. Can we stay awake with our attention and presence? It is His fervent hope and prayer that we do.

We are called to participate in this parade of paradox ... winding through each day this week until, at last, the Easter Parade victoriously shouts, "Alleluia!"

We are people of the resurrection after all, living our lives for the King. So join us! Join Jesus for the parade of palms. Join us in his parade of love for all time and for all people! Amen.