

Palm Sunday – 2022  
Luke 19:28-40  
Philippians 2:5-11  
Passion according to Luke

The western Christian world begins the holiest week of the year today; one week ahead of the east. But, if you take step back, have you ever considered why we observe what we do in the way that we do? Christians commemorate the strangest things. We make a big deal over the fact that Jesus was born in a cave or a stable full of smelly animals, to a couple of dirt-poor Jews. We tell all sorts of stories about Jesus' closest followers, his most devoted disciples -- focusing on their being ignorant fishermen and recalling fondly how they constantly misunderstood him, doubted him, talked back to him, and betrayed him. Most of all, we actually admit that, well, yes, Jesus was executed as a state criminal, crucified between a couple of common thieves, and he died hanging on an ugly cross.

Not the least strange among these odd celebrations is Palm Sunday. Jesus, an itinerant prophet out of Nazareth, mounted a borrowed half-grown donkey and, accompanied by the powerless rabble that always seemed to hang around him, bumped his way through the city gates on the outskirts of town. That was the whole event. There was no more to it. The crowd lost its energy and momentum and quickly dispersed. Someone hopefully returned the donkey to its rightful owner and Jesus and his close friends began to wander around to see the sights. Yet, want to hear something really odd? As he entered the city, Jesus was filled with confidence in the power of his weakness.

Perhaps He knew what Paul would write almost 30 years later: that emptying Himself, He would be given a name above every other name. These words became a hymn of the early Christian church: a hymn that connected them with the events of Holy Week.

We consider those events today and particularly the event known as Palm Sunday. But we also know that the cheers of Palm Sunday turned by week's end to the jeers of Good Friday.

There is a major difference between the beginning of our worship today and the end. Cheers and palm branch waving are

outdoor activities: big and bold. Sadness and misery are feeling of the passion: somber feelings of suffering and death. We move from one extreme to the other.

Our reading from Luke today – Luke's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem even intensifies the contrast. In both Mark's account and in Matthew's account, the people cut leafy branches from trees and lay them and their coats before Jesus. John only reports palm branches. Luke only records the people spreading their garments on the road ahead of Jesus. No palm branches – no leafy branches. What would it be like if instead of palms, we would all lay our coats on the floor and walk on them? That's more personal – more intimate - less comfortable.

Jesus didn't come into this world to lead his people in a military conquest of their enemies, the Roman Empire. He didn't come to set himself as a worldly king or his own people as the elite class at the expense of those who were currently in power.

Jesus came, in his own words, to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

In other words, Jesus came to save the people on the bottom: the folks for whom social programs had failed, the people for whom the minimum wage was inadequate to support themselves or their families, and the people for whom the government medical insurance plan was envisioned.

He came to eat with sinners, to talk to prostitutes and tax collectors and lepers and folks whom the social order had deemed worthless.

He came to feed the hungry and visit those in prison, and to equalize the social order so that those who live at the top of society, those who have set their nests on high to be safe from the reach of harm, the 1% and those who are comfortable, would no longer be able to enjoy those benefits if their lifestyle came at a high price to everyone else.

He came to turn the social order on its head.

And his actions, which were nothing short of radical and revolutionary, cost him his life.

Jesus came, put Himself in danger and then paid the price.

So why did Jesus do it? Why did he ride into Jerusalem on the back of a colt, a beast of burden, knowing that all of this would certainly take him straight to the cross?

He did it for faith.

He did it for hope.

He did it for love.

But was what he did just all for nothing? Was it just a waste? Was it worth it?

He did it to become one of us – like us in all things but sin. He came, emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave and then invited us to be like Him and to do the things that He did. A favorite hymn of many is “Just a Closer Walk with Thee.” There’s another song in The Faith We Sing, the black hymnal that we often use, another favorite, “Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley.” Jesus walked His lonesome valley, but the song goes on to say that we each walk our own lonesome valley. We have to walk; we each have to stand our trials, but we don’t walk it by ourselves. Jesus goes before us and as He goes, Jesus offers some very strange rules for the road:

- go the extra mile ...
- turn the other cheek ...
- give your coat and your cloak also ...
- cross the road to help - don't cross the road to hide ...

On this Palm/Passion Sunday, we read just how far Jesus would journey along the road that runs through the human condition.

- He rode a clumsy colt into Jerusalem to be in that holy city during the most sacred of celebrations, the Passover.
- He climbed to the Upper Room to dine with his disciples.
- He traveled through his lonely prayers in Gethsemane.
- He left with the soldiers.
- He confronted Caiaphas.
- He stood before Pilate.
- He rubbed elbows with Barabbas.
- He stumbled to Golgotha.
- He was lifted up on his final journey, up onto the cross.

To be a disciple of Jesus the Christ is to live life not standing against, but walking alongside. The life of a disciple is a double

movement - a life of dying with Christ and a life of rising with Christ; a life of emptying oneself and a life of utter fulfillment; a life of taking up one's cross and a life of taking up one's bed, walking, and rejoicing and praising God, a life of the cross, and a life of resurrection, a life of travail and a life of enjoyment.

We start the week in celebration; we walk through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday until we arrive in the dark morning of Easter Sunday: a darkness that does not and cannot last – a darkness that is overcome by light. But we have to walk the journey – the whole journey – and walk it with Jesus in imitation with Jesus.

Overcoming leads to victory: victory over sin and death and a place with Jesus forever.