

Palm/Passion Sunday – 2025
Luke 19:28-40 The Passion According to Luke

Today's worship service begins with the story of a parade which started me thinking about parades this week. I don't know that we do parades very well these days – or, at least, I don't. I'm not all that interested in standing out in the weather although we do have parades in Waupun: The Truckin' Show, 4th of July, Memorial Day.

I've been in parades: as a child with my grade school on the 4th of July when we marched to the local park for games and a picnic – walking past and picking up contingents from other schools to form a blocks-long parade. I was even in a marching band that appeared in parades. But how does the parade we hear about at the top of our worship hour – a parade honoring Jesus – affect us today?

Our closest American equivalent to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, with all its symbolism, is the tradition of the ticker tape parade. We celebrate sports champions, astronauts, and others with these parades in New York City. The first one was 1886, and was unplanned. "As the parade in honor of the dedication of the Statue of Liberty marched up Broadway, employees spontaneously threw ticker tape out of their office windows to join in the celebration, giving the tradition its name. Celebrations continued intermittently over the next few decades, with more formally scheduled events beginning in 1919 with a parade for 25-year-old Edward Albert, the Prince of Wales.

The ticker-tape parade is mostly closely associated with New York sports teams, but that wasn't always the case. The first athletes weren't honored until 1924, and before 1999 the parades were primarily used to honor world leaders, military veterans, and astronauts, and to celebrate achievements in exploration, aviation, and science. The astronauts of Apollo 11 were honored in 1969 after the moon landing. Theodore Roosevelt was welcomed back from his African safari with a parade. Nelson Mandela, Albert Einstein, Pope John Paul II, John Glenn, Amelia Earhart, Queen Elizabeth II, and John F. Kennedy are a few more of the many individuals to receive a parade in their honor.

All things change, and even the ticker tape parade no longer uses actual ticker tape. Though still known as "ticker-tape parades,"

the parades themselves have not featured ticker tape in quite some time. The 1-inch strip of paper was used to print stock quotes from the ticker machine, popular in lower Manhattan's financial district, which became the parade route. As the stock exchange moved to electronic boards in the 1960s, ticker tape was no longer in use, and shredded paper and confetti took its place.

Palm branches were the confetti and ticker tape of Jesus' time and the ancient Middle Eastern world. But a close reading of the Luke passage should reveal something that isn't there. There are no palms.

No one spontaneously cut down branches for Jesus and the donkey, and or/the foal of a donkey to ride into Jerusalem. They put their coats on the animal and on the road, but no one cut down branches. We have palm branches today, but what if we were faithful to Luke's gospel? How would that change things?

Instead of waving signs of victory, of paradise, and of celebration, Luke emphasizes instead the act of spreading cloaks on the ground. Here we have an act of deep reverence and subservience. I think we are less comfortable with reverence and worship and submission than we are with victory and celebration: the joyous elements in parades and life.

Once upon a time, I was more liturgically rigid than I am now. I would never have even considered combining Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. The Passion story was for Good Friday, but as the years have gone by, fewer and fewer people have been able or have chosen to worship on Good Friday. I've heard people say "I don't do that Good Friday atmosphere. It's so depressing; it's such a downer." So, if people miss the Maundy Thursday worship and miss the Good Friday worship, they move from the parade of Palm Sunday to the triumph of Easter.

But so what.

Is focusing solely on Palm Sunday and missing the Passion important? Do people miss the point that we are part of both crowds: part of the crowd that cheered Jesus at the beginning of the week and also part of the crowd that shouted "Crucify Him? When people reach a little bit of maturity, we realize that life is comprised of "both/and." Life is not all sunshine, lollipops, and rainbows. Life sometimes happens to us and sometimes we cause our own misfortune with poor choices. It can be difficult to survive and

navigate our way through the “dark woods” when what we thought was right turns out not to be. Combining Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday can help us to deal with the highs and the lows of life. We are part of broth crowds.

Jesus was accustomed to the crowds. He was always around crowds for the entire three years while he was teaching, preaching, healing, and performing miracles.

Remember, there was a crowd around him when he delivered his Sermon on the Mount. He fed a crowd of 5,000 men besides women and children in Jewish territory. Later, he fed a crowd of 4,000 in Gentile territory. He called Zacchaeus down from the sycamore tree when the short tax collector climbed it to see Jesus in the crowd.

Having a large crowd of people around Jesus on Palm Sunday was no problem for him at all, but everyone in that crowd was not there for the right reason. ...

There were five distinct crowds that included people with five different agendas and five different motives. ...

The curious crowd had seen Jesus preach, teach, heal, and perform many miracles over a three-year period. “Who is this Jesus? Is He who they say He is? ...”

The confused crowd is illustrated in Matthew 21:10-11, “When Jesus came to Jerusalem, everyone in the city was excited and asked, “Who can this be?”. ... Even though they were following him, they were still confused about who Jesus was. ...

The third group included *the pretenders*. They were in the crowd on Palm Sunday pretending to be committed to Jesus. They were pretending, but they were not completely sold – not all in...

The fourth group included *the opposers* like the Pharisees and the Sadducees. ... There are opposers today who promote their own interests and their own agendas. Opposers try to tear down God's people just like the Pharisees and Sadducees tried to do to Jesus. ...

The committed crowd is the last group and the one most people say they are in. However, unfortunately, this is the smallest group.

Luke writes his gospel to help his readers understand that all the events of this week are part of God's plan and desire that none would be lost but that all could come to find forgiveness and salvation in and through Jesus. He invites us to be part of the committed crowd. Experiencing the highs and the lows prepares us to receive and appreciate the hope and final victory in Jesus' resurrection.

As we lift up the palms of our praise on this Palm/Passion Sunday, might we also lay down ways of living that do not honor God, our neighbor, and all life around us? As we lift our voices crying out for an end to injustice and suffering, might we also lay down our lives, allowing Christ to fill them with humility and the new beginnings of hope? As we lift our palms with songs to bless the One who comes in peace, might we also lay down the superficial cries of victory and triumph? As we lift our eyes to see a vision of earth and heaven made one, might we also lay down our expectations of how God will change us and our world; of how God will come into our lives to accomplish this? And in our lifting up and laying down, God might just count us among those who stand in the crowd around the throne of God in heaven shouting "Hallelujah!" and worshiping.

The triumphant parade with shouts of joy and blessing can lift our spirits and cause our hearts to rise and swell to the highest of highs. But the excitement of the boisterous parade where Jesus is accepted by the crowds will fade, and our hearts will again slip to the depths of despair, and Jesus is rejected. Holy Week brings us to a space and a time for lament, for struggle, for sorrow. Time slows, and we will walk through betrayal and unanswered prayer into darkness and death. We have done the work to prepare our hearts to walk from the procession to the table, from the cross to the stone-cold tomb.

Today, as we celebrate Emmanuel who came to live, and work, and dance among us, perhaps we are the stones who cry out – perhaps we are the borrowed colt. Perhaps we need to lay down our coats to line the way. The final days of God's salvation story begins today and the story continues through the week, and in remembering that first Palm Parade today, we have prepared our feet to follow its path with a hope that is stronger than despair, a light that is stronger than darkness, and a love that is stronger than death.