

Luke 19:28-40

<sup>28</sup>After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

<sup>29</sup>When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” <sup>32</sup>So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup>They said, “The Lord needs it.” <sup>35</sup>Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup>As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup>As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup>saying,

“Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven,  
and glory in the highest heaven!”

<sup>39</sup>Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” <sup>40</sup>He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

There is no celebration in the Christian tradition that is so uniformly agreed upon as Palm Sunday. Easter, Christmas, and Pentecost are all vital to our Church Year but a good deal of latitude is allowed in how they are celebrated. However, we commemorate Palm Sunday in a prescribed fashion; it is written right into the title. We’re going to wave Palms. There will be a procession and the word “Hosanna” will figure prominently. That’s the way it was done the first time and Christianity has not improved on the formula.

This joyful celebration begins the pivotal week of our religion. Jesus rides into Jerusalem this morning. In short order, there will be a noisy confrontation in the temple; the Last Supper will inaugurate a source of spiritual nourishment for the Church; and Jesus will be arrested and crucified. All of those things will be witnessed by Jesus’ followers and the people of Jerusalem – but Palm Sunday, the celebration as Jesus rides into town, that is not a time to watch. No spectators are mentioned in our Gospel reading this morning. Everybody responded to Jesus. Jesus even hinted that the rocks themselves might join in the fun.

The joy of that happy day brought an excited commitment to Jesus. Nobody was being cautious, wondering what they were getting into. They threw their cloaks on the road in an extravagant gift of welcome. They gave themselves up to a spontaneous discipleship and it resulted in an admirable celebration that is still revered two thousand years later. Generation after generation in hundreds of languages around the world, we’re still trying to recapture that moment.

Of course, the week that began with this celebration of welcome ended in Jesus’ execution. This always leaves us with the question: “Was the celebration of Palm Sunday made

into a mockery by the crucifixion that followed?" It is a question worth considering. Jesus' death cannot be shrugged off.

But neither is Jesus' death the last word. We know death well; but we are Christians because of the resurrection.

The celebration does not end with Good Friday. It continues through Easter. The love of God, the power that was being welcomed into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, that love defeats death. It wasn't the palms that were waved or the Hosannas that were sung by the people who welcomed Jesus. It was the powerful love of God that defeated death and continued the celebration.

This is Consecration Sunday. This is the day that the people of Peace Lutheran Church will say how we will participate in the mission and the ministry of Jesus. That's what we do on Consecration Sunday. We have received cards in the mail to indicate how much money we plan to give to the work of this congregation, our synod, and our national church. We began to think about our discipleship on the first Sunday of Lent when Pastor Blom was our guest and spoke to us about Jesus in the wilderness. Pastor Bolt came last week and reflected on the story of Mary as she anointed Jesus with an extravagant gift of oil. We have given ourselves time to pray and consider what we will give in the coming year to do the work of this congregation. And now it is the last Sunday in Lent, Palm Sunday. Jesus is riding into Jerusalem and we have the chance to respond. Things haven't changed much over the years. It might have been a good idea to write how much money we plan to give in the coming year on palm branches and wave them in front of Jesus and say, "Hosanna" and celebrate him coming into our lives. It would have been much the same as the story we read this morning.

Those who have wondered over the generations about how Palm Sunday leads to Good Friday might raise the question: "Was the celebration of Palm Sunday made into a mockery by the crucifixion that followed?" They might ask, "Shouldn't we be careful with our plans? Remember how it turned out before. For all of the excitement of Jesus' followers, and all the joy of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem – there is a cross waiting and the story will end in death."

It is an anxiety of long-standing. The Apostle Paul called the cross a "stumbling block" to discipleship.

If we see Friday as the end of the story, then the "Hosannas" will ring hollow. We will not write our plans for the year on those palm branches; we will write, "I'd turn back if I were you." And the spontaneous joy of welcome will be reduced to "Let's not get carried away. There is a limit to what we can accomplish."

It's true. There *is* a limit to what *we* can accomplish. But, don't limit the accomplishments of the Kingdom of God to what we can do on our own. What people can do on their own *will* end on Good Friday. We are bound by the power of death. Palm Sunday has always been a celebration that a greater power than ours is riding into our lives.

These cards that we present this morning serve the same purpose as the palms and cloaks we read about this morning. They welcome Jesus.

In some sense, it isn't practical to welcome Jesus. If we calculate expense and return and confine the ciphers to our own bank accounts – we won't get past the cross at the end of the road. All it would take would be one person, somewhat apart from the other revelers, to say, "Couldn't you think of a way to spend that money on yourself and your family?" And in the case of every person gathered here today (and, incidentally, every person who has ever lived) the answer would be, "yes".

But the future is not limited to our abilities, and our vision. Even the things we want for our families are not limited to the things that we can give them. **We want our lives, our future, our families, and our church to be part of the Kingdom of God.**

Let's welcome Jesus. He has to be part of everything if this is going to be his Kingdom. Let's plan how we will be part of his ministry. In the coming year, let's commit ourselves to pray, worship, give, and live with the power of God.

Nothing reflects us so accurately as our church. No other group that we are part of – not your school or your city government.

When people come to Peace Lutheran Church, will they find a welcoming group with whom to worship God? They will if our members have come here to worship. Will we have Sunday School classes? If people think it's important enough to attend and to bring their children. Will we maintain this building? Will we support the work of our synod and our seminaries? There are missionaries overseas and immigration services here at home. Adoption agencies, ecumenical dialogs, inner city shelters.

Let's commit ourselves now to the coming year. Every Sunday morning smile at a stranger, every hymn sung, every dollar given, every new idea considered welcomes Jesus. They are our joyful gifts. All of those things would be easy to dismiss if they went no further than our ability to give them. But we are putting them in the hands of God. God's love is not diminished when it is used. It grows.

This Palm Sunday story does not end on Friday. It continues through next Sunday. Jesus stepped out of the tomb on Sunday morning, and changed the world by doing it. And, it's possible, that, on the ground nearby, he saw a discarded palm branch from the previous week. And he valued that branch, and he valued the hand that had waved it.

Jesus does not scorn our gifts because they are not greater. He cherishes the love and joy with which those gifts are given. Our gifts welcome Jesus and when Jesus is with us, we live in his kingdom.