

Last year was the first time we took Dean to see a parade. It wasn't just any parade. It was the annual firemen's parade in Culpeper, Virginia. You may or may not know that my son Dean is obsessed with firetrucks. I thought it was just a phase when he was two, but every day he asks to watch firetrucks on T.V. and he plays with the many firetrucks he has acquired. My favorite part of the parade was seeing his face light up as all the different firetrucks came down the road. He was just as excited when he saw the last firetruck as when he saw the first firetruck. Parades are a fun way to celebrate and be part of a community. It is a day when the whole community puts aside their differences and celebrates something they have in common.

In our Scripture for today from the gospel of Luke, we hear about a parade of sorts. It was the second parade that had taken place in Jerusalem in a short amount of time. Reverend Todd and Jennifer Pick describe the first parade that took place: “As Roman imperialism crushed and oppressed God's people, Pilate made the trip into town to uphold law and order. Pilate must have entered the city in a procession of pomp complete with war horses and an armored army.”ⁱ

The people of Jerusalem probably did not celebrate this parade. They may have been interested to see it take place, but the feeling left with the parade would be fear and not excitement. This was an officer of the law they had to follow, whether they wanted to or not or there would be extreme consequences. While it was probably impressive to witness Pilate's entrance into town with his armed guards, beautiful horses, and decorated vestments, the people did not celebrate his entrance into town. Pilate was comfortable riding a war horse as he had been a knight before he was elected to hold a government role.ⁱⁱ He probably walked through the streets head held high, back straight projecting an image of authority as he looked down on the people.

In stark contrast, we hear about the second parade, Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. We find this account in every gospel. Although each gospel details the event a little differently, we hear that Jesus rides into town on a lowly colt found by his disciples and that people line his path with palms and their own cloaks. John 12:13 tells us the people “took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!^[a]” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”^[b] “Blessed is the king of Israel!”

In this parade, the people of Jerusalem recognized Jesus Christ as king. They were not frightened by his presence, but excited that the promised Messiah was coming to save them. All along the way in this parade process, Jesus' disciples were reciting all of his amazing deeds and miracles, just in case people did not know who he was. Jesus did not come into town proud and arrogant like Pilate.

He came into town as a humble servant. He was unarmed, he did not have beautiful vestments, but he had come to be among the people and show them that the Son of God was with them. Jesus entry marks one week from his resurrection, and this is why Palm Sunday kicks off holy week. It is the marking of the trajectory that Jesus is taking from Jerusalem, to the cross, to the tomb and beyond.

In the midst of five weeks of Lent where we have been focusing on Jesus’ final words from the cross, understanding the weightiness of Christ’s sacrifice for us, today is considered a little Easter, a time of celebration and joy as Jesus Christ was recognized for who he was. On Palm Sunday I always smile being thankful that Jesus had a least one day where he was celebrated, one day where people understood who he was and why he had come into the world.

The people recognized the importance of this day by their response. They did not have a lot to give Jesus, but they laid down their clothes to mark his path. They took palm branches which held important significance to welcome Jesus. In the Old Testament, we learn that palm branches symbolized “goodness, well-being, and victory. They were often depicted on coins and important buildings. [King Solomon](#) had palm branches carved into the walls and doors of the temple: "On the walls all around the temple, in both the inner and outer rooms, he carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers" (1 Kings 6:29).ⁱⁱⁱ

We also see that palm branches are mentioned in the book of Revelations. In Revelation 7:9 the Bible reads: "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."

It was important that palm branches were used on this important day, because this action signified that the people recognized Jesus as a king who was coming to save them. In fact, that is what Hosanna means, “Save us!”^{iv} We hear these same words, a plea for God to save us in our Psalter reading today from Psalm 118: 25: “Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!”

Those who welcomed Jesus thought he had come to be a political figure who would overthrow Pilate and save the people from Roman rule. They did not yet understand that Jesus had come to save them from their sins. They would only understand this action, after it occurred.

Imagine the anticipation the people must have felt that day. Just as a child is experiencing a parade for the first time, I can imagine the people getting close to one another shoulder to shoulder so they could see the promised messiah enter Jerusalem. I wonder what their expectations were. Did they think that Jesus would arrive with fanfare? Were they surprised that he arrived on a lowly colt? Did they feel more connected to Christ because he arrived in this manner?

I would have given anything to be there that day. Jesus the servant of the world, came into town on a lowly donkey to save the world, not with weapons and warfare, but with the love of God.

Jesus is not what the people expected. He was approachable. He took time to speak to those who were considered untouchable. He healed lepers and those who were very ill, paralyzed or already dead. He took time to equip and teach his disciples. He cared about his family and friends. He did not lead by invoking fear, but through bestowing grace.

Jesus’ servant ministry is a hallmark to the way that he led people to God. He led by example. He showed people that effective evangelism happens through relationships. Some of the most powerful stories in the gospels are when Jesus started a relationship with someone unexpected. Some of the most powerful parables in the Bible, told by Jesus are about the unexpected relationships that occur when we offer one another grace and forgiveness. What an amazing God we serve!

The question before us today is how are we worshipping God with our lives? We know that the very same people who worshipped Jesus as king, only a week later would yell “Crucify him!” We are called to continue to recognize Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives through the way that we embody the servant ministry of Jesus Christ.

We embody the servant ministry of Jesus Christ when we put God and other people above our own needs, when we share our resources, when we help the lowly and oppressed, when we make time to build relationships with people that we would not know otherwise.

The beautiful thing about the early church that we hear about in Acts 2 is the way they lived together in community. This was after Jesus had been resurrected, and after the Holy Spirit had come on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:44-47 reads: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

These first converts to Christ are much like us. Only this past Wednesday we shared our resources and time to host the community Lenten dinner and all who came were given a delicious meal and all who came felt welcomed because we prepared for them to come.

As a church, we continue to share our resources through our gifts to the church, through the time we take to write cards and check on people who are sick or unable to come. We embody the servant ministry of Jesus Christ when we pick up a palm and lay down our burdens at the cross so Jesus can take them on, and we can become free.

The good news for our lives today is that Jesus Christ is still Lord, the same way he was on the Palm Sunday thousands of years ago.

This week, as we continue our Holy Week journey from Jerusalem to the cross, to the tomb, we are called to really let go of the things that are inhibiting us from having a better relationship with Jesus Christ. We are called to forgive; we are called to sacrifice our time so that others may know the living God.

On Maundy Thursday we will embody the Last Supper through giving Communion to each other. On Good Friday we will meditate on the stations of the cross and pierce nails through the sins we want to surrender to God, and then on Easter Sunday we will celebrate that we serve a God who can defeat death so that we may be free. I do hope to see you at each of our Holy week events this week as we continue to celebrate the servant king we worship.

As we go forth from this place today, may we have joy on our hearts that Jesus Christ is still offering us hope and life. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lent-2019-worship-planning-series/april-14-palm-passion-sunday-year-c/palm-passion-sunday-2019-year-c-preaching-notes>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pontius-Pilate>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.thoughtco.com/palm-branches-bible-story-summary-701202>

^{iv} <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-does-hosanna-mean.html>