

Children's Moment *Why do we wave palm branches on this Sunday?*

Good morning, boys and girls.

I hope you all were able to join our parade this morning at your house. It was fun to walk around saying Hosanna and waving palm branches.

Do you know what Hosanna means? Hosanna is a word in the Hebrew language that means "save us." Everyone in the parade was excited, singing and dancing because they thought Jesus was coming to take care of things. They wouldn't have to be afraid of soldiers or bad people. They wouldn't have to hide at home.

The people in the parade were either waving palm branches or they were putting coats on the road to make it comfortable for Jesus to walk on.

Do you know why they did that? It was like having a parade with confetti, glitter and a red carpet today. That's how they let everyone know a very special person was coming. In Jesus' time, that's how they let everyone know that a great king was coming.

We wave palms today for a couple of reasons. We remember who Jesus was and we want to let other people know he was a great person. We also do it to invite Jesus to come into our heart and mind. We are telling others Jesus is special to us and we aren't afraid to show it. That's good because it reminds other people they can love Jesus, too. When they do, their lives will be made better.

I invite you to put your palms in the front window for everyone to see. Invite them to join you in the parade.

Let's pray ...

Message: “Will You Let Jesus In?”

This morning we woke up to the news that at least 1.2 million people have contracted the coronavirus and more than 64,000 people have died. Those are sobering numbers. They’re the reason we’re practicing Safer @ Home. One number you may not hear as much is that at least 244,000 people have recovered from the virus.¹ There is hope and recovery. Our thoughts and prayers go to the family and friends of all who are sick and those who have died.

We’re all struggling to make sense of the threat, cope with lives that are changing every day and work through the grief that we’re all feeling. Our daily lives are far from normal. We’re feeling distant and disconnected from our friends and family. Many of us are struggling to cope with lost jobs, closed businesses and difficult financial decisions.

Consciously or not, we’re all working through the six steps of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, acceptance and meaning.²

We can find meaning in what comes out of our shared experience, but we all have to go through the steps first. We respond differently. We don’t go through the steps in order. We can be good one moment and then find ourselves back in denial or anger over a small thing.

If you’re struggling to cope, you’re in good company.

Don’t be ashamed when you’re sad, anxious or angry. Those are normal, God-given feelings and emotions. It’s healthy to acknowledge them. Naming our pain helps us work through the steps of grief. It’s not healthy when we get “stuck,” ignoring our emotions or trying to force ourselves to respond in a certain way.

The disciples and Jesus’ friends and family are a good example of a group of people who worked through a shared grief. Our Scripture for today, Matthew 26, shows us an example. It focuses on Peter, the group’s leader, the one who was most outspoken and courageous. The lesson reassures me for it gives me permission to embrace my faults, failures and hurt feelings, knowing that Jesus forgives me. That’s true for you as well. Let’s look at what Peter was dealing with.

¹ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

² David Kessler and Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*, ISBN-10 1476775559. Visit www.grief.com for more information.

Peter must have been thinking, “How do it all go so wrong?”

Only a few days earlier, he was part of the parade when Jesus entered Jerusalem. The crowd waved palms, laid their cloaks on the road, sang and danced ... everything you would expect them to do in celebration of their king.

Later in the week, Jesus surprised the group with dinner in an upper room in a home. It was an intimate gathering of Jesus’ closest friends, his disciples. Jesus made a personal connection with each of them. The evening ended badly with everyone upset, sullen and silent. They were afraid and overcome by grief.

To everyone’s shock and surprise, Jesus was betrayed by Judas. He was taken prisoner by the authorities. Peter followed them, was spotted and added insult to injury by publicly denying that he knew Jesus. Peter fled the scene weeping, leaving Jesus to stand trial alone, surrounded only by enemies.

Jesus was publicly humiliated, spit on, beaten and whipped. The authorities dressed him in a royal robe and put a crown of thorns on his head to mock him. Innocent, he was falsely accused of crimes, tried and sentenced to death. The crowd cheered and urged the Romans on.

Suffering, Jesus carried his own cross to a hill outside the city. This is the famous via dolorosa that Donna sang about earlier.

Finally, on the hill known as Golgotha, the place of the skull, Jesus was crucified on a cross and left to die. In full view of anyone who passed by on the road, he hung on a cross between two criminals. The other disciples fled, warned by Jesus they would be treated like criminals if they were caught. Jesus’ mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, John and his mother watched from a distance. Then Jesus died.

What?? Wait a minute!

I’m sure Peter was thinking, “Can we go back to the parade, please?” What Jesus’ family, followers and friends feared most happened. The terrible thing they were anxious about occurred. They’ve moved beyond anticipatory grief to mourning. Everyone’s in shock. They don’t know what to do.

Many people feel the same way today. A few short weeks ago, the coronavirus was a distant rumor. We never imagined it would become a full-blown pandemic or that it would seem to hit us right where we're weakest. It's bringing out the worst in some people. Given the dramatic rise in cases and deaths, we're moving past anticipatory grief to mourning. We're in shock, struggling to cope. No one has answers.

I believe the answer is right in front of us. We can stop denying what we know to be true, move past our anger, cease bargaining and get through sadness. When we do, we'll accept the new life we're being led to and discover richer, deeper meaning in that life. You're the one who chooses what's important and how you'll respond.

Let me be clear: Jesus is the answer. I say that because of who Jesus is and how he gives us hope. Here are two reasons:

- **Jesus' identity is in the parade,** but
- **Jesus' divinity is on the cross.**

Jesus didn't need a parade. Jesus knew who he was. We know that from what Jesus said when he raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. Jesus looks to heaven and prays, "*God, ... I know you always listen, but on account of this crowd standing here I've spoken so they might believe you sent me*" (John 11:42, MSG).

Jesus knew the meaning and purpose of his life. He was born to save us. Jesus' birth gives us joy. He taught us a new way to live and then showed us by living it, wholly and completely. Jesus loved us so much he was willing to die to save us from ourselves. Jesus suffered because this world is broken. Jesus suffered and, in doing so, knows our pain, suffering and grief. Jesus forgives us, knowing the depth of our anguish and depravity, knowing forgiveness is the way to true healing. Jesus came to give us the gift of freedom from our suffering and fear. That's how he fulfills God's promise.

Turning back to that hillside with Lazarus' family, Jesus reveals the most important truth of the Bible. Jesus says, "*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" (John 11:25-26, MSG). This is a sign for all time.

Jesus is always reaching out asking, “Do YOU believe?”

We’re living in life-changing times. We’re looking for answers, for ways to cope and work through our anxiety, doubt and grief. Jesus offers life that transcends our greatest fear, the fear of death.

What will you choose?

You have three options. Oxford professor C.S. Lewis, known for the Narnia books as well as non-fiction writing, simplifies it for us, “Jesus is a liar, lunatic or lord” - C.S. Lewis (paraphrase)³

If you choose liar or lunatic, you’re turning away from Jesus.

You’re saying you don’t want to be in a relationship with him at this time. (*note: you can always change your mind. Jesus forgives.*) That path leads to spiritual numbness, loneliness and darkness.

If you choose lord, you’re accepting Jesus for who and what he is, the Messiah. Jesus is the one who has the power to save you and give you eternal life. Jesus will walk through life with you, guiding, protecting and teaching you every step of the way.

Will you let Jesus in? You may not be ready today.

I understand. I walked that path for many years. But I’ll tell you from my own experience life in relationship with Jesus is so much better than life on my own. When I was on my own, I carried around a lot of guilt and shame. My fears drove me. My heart and mind were restless. I turned to unhealthy things and developed bad habits. One night, I finally broke down and truly accepted Jesus in my heart. My life changed and I’ve never looked back.

Listen to Jesus’ final words on the cross. They make all the difference, *Father, forgive them; for they don’t know what they’re doing*” (Luke 23:34, NRSV). It’s never too late. Jesus’ love is so powerful and deep there’s nothing it can’t overcome. There’s no such thing as ugly, slow, loser, fool or failure in Jesus’ family. Nothing you’ve done will turn him away. We have nothing to fear by accepting his love, only faith, hope and love to gain.

Jesus is reaching out to you now. Will you let Jesus in?

³ <https://www.lewisquotes.com/quotations/jesus/jesus-lord-liar-or-lunatic.html>

Reflection & Prayer

We don't share personal prayer requests online. We send them out through our prayer chain. Send us an email to get on the distribution list. Of you can ask for private prayer from the pastor.

Reflect in silence while listening to music

O Christ, your life was not easy, you carried a cross;
may we walk along the same road as you.

O Christ, by your suffering you learned faithfulness;
you became a source of eternal salvation for the whole human race.

O Christ, when threatened you did not retaliate;
enable us to forgive to the very end.

O Christ, you see the pain of those who are exiled and abandoned;
take their suffering upon yourself.

O Christ, when lies and worries try to separate us from you,
your Holy Spirit is always with us.

O Christ, you are the happiness of those who follow you:
enable us to live by your trust.

O Christ, our life is hidden with you in God;
that is a joy that touches the depths of the soul.

Strengthen us, Eternal God, and we will wait in silence and peace until
the light of the resurrection rises upon us.⁴ In Jesus' name we pray,
amen.

Opportunities to Serve: Invite-Connect-Engage

- Call someone and listen to them (non-anxious way)
- Pray for them and let them know you did
- Ask how you can help

Sending with Blessing *John Hunter, BOW #567*

Grant, O Lord, that what has been said with our lips we may believe in
our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our
lives; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

⁴ https://www.taize.fr/en_article5806.html?id_document=5828

Psalm 31:9–16 (CEB)

Have mercy on me, Lord, because I'm depressed.

My vision fails because of my grief,
as do my spirit and my body.

My life is consumed with sadness;
my years are consumed with groaning.

Strength fails me because of my suffering;
my bones dry up.

I'm a joke to all my enemies,
still worse to my neighbors.

I scare my friends,
and whoever sees me in the street runs away!

I am forgotten, like I'm dead,
completely out of mind;

I am like a piece of pottery, destroyed.

Yes, I've heard all the gossiping,
terror all around;

so many gang up together against me,
they plan to take my life!

But me? I trust you, Lord!

I affirm, "You are my God."

My future is in your hands.

Don't hand me over to my enemies,
to all who are out to get me!

Shine your face on your servant;
save me by your faithful love!

Matthew 26:20-22,31-35,57-74 (CEB)

That evening he took his place at the table with the twelve disciples. As they were eating he said, “I assure you that one of you will betray me.”

Deeply saddened, each one said to him, “I’m not the one, am I, Lord?”

...

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Tonight you will all fall away because of me. This is because it is written, *I will hit the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will go off in all directions*. But after I’m raised up, I’ll go before you to Galilee.”

Peter replied, “If everyone else stumbles because of you, I’ll never stumble.”

Jesus said to him, “I assure you that, before the rooster crows tonight, you will deny me three times.”

Peter said, “Even if I must die alongside you, I won’t deny you.” All the disciples said the same thing.

...

Those who arrested Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest. The legal experts and the elders had gathered there. Peter followed him from a distance until he came to the high priest’s courtyard. He entered that area and sat outside with the officers to see how it would turn out.

The chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they could put him to death. They didn’t find anything they could use from the many false witnesses who were willing to come forward. But finally they found two who said, “This man said, ‘I can destroy God’s temple and rebuild it in three days.’”

Then the high priest stood and said to Jesus, “Aren’t you going to respond to the testimony these people have brought against you?”

But Jesus was silent.

The high priest said, “By the living God, I demand that you tell us whether you are the Christ, God’s Son.”

“You said it,” Jesus replied. “But I say to you that from now on you’ll see *the Human One sitting on the right side of the Almighty and coming on the heavenly clouds.*”

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He’s insulting God! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, you’ve heard his insult against God. What do you think?”

And they answered, “He deserves to die!” Then they spit in his face and beat him. They hit him and said, “Prophecy for us, Christ! Who hit you?”

Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant woman came and said to him, “You were also with Jesus the Galilean.”

But he denied it in front of all of them, saying, “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

When he went over to the gate, another woman saw him and said to those who were there, “This man was with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.”

With a solemn pledge, he denied it again, saying, “I don’t know the man.”

A short time later those standing there came and said to Peter, “You must be one of them. The way you talk gives you away.”

Then he cursed and swore, “I don’t know the man!” At that very moment the rooster crowed.