

St. Paul's, Concord
Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019
Luke 19:28-40
Rev. Kate Atkinson

There's a dramatized reading of Luke's Passion after this service – but we're going to have a little drama *now* as well and you're part of it! I'd like us to pretend that we're the people of Jerusalem, welcoming Jesus into the city. So let's get ourselves into character. Remember, we've heard all about this man and the amazing things he's done. We know he can out-talk even the chief priests and Pharisees, he can even heal the sick and raise the dead.

We know that, just a short time ago, he brought a man called Lazarus back to life when he'd been dead for *four* days. Now he's on his way into Jerusalem; just imagine what amazing things he could do here!

But there's more. We're all good Jewish folks and we know our Scripture. In chapter 9 of the book of Zechariah, the prophet says:

*Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* Zechariah 9:9b

As a nation, we've been waiting all our lives for the Messiah to come. We're desperate for him to come quickly and bring us freedom from poverty and oppression. We know Jerusalem is God's holy city. We know that, when our King arrives, he'll bring the glory and honor that God promised. So when we realize that *Jesus* is arriving on a donkey, we go absolutely wild. We shout praises to the King, we wave palm branches as a sign of respect, some of us even take off our cloaks and spread them in the road for Jesus to ride over.

Imagine the shouting, the cheering: *Hosannah, Lord, Hosannah!* (Psalm 118:25a); *Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!* (Luke 19:38a); *Hosanna in the highest!* (BCP Pg. 271) Imagine the forest of palm branches waving in the air – the swirl of cloaks covering the ground. This isn't mild curiosity, it's pandemonium!

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, the people couldn't contain their excitement. You never heard such a racket. But it wasn't long before the shouts faded away, the palm leaves were thrown on the compost piles, and the cloaks were picked up and dusted off and wrapped around the shoulders of people returning to ordinary life.

The citizens of Jerusalem decided that, if Jesus really *was* a king, he wouldn't have arrived on a donkey — not even a fully grown donkey at that. He would have been riding a mighty charger, wearing armor, brandishing a spear and a sword. There would have been battles and bloodshed and a glorious victory. Never mind what the prophet Zechariah said; there must have been some mistake. What good is a gentle and righteous king anyway?

So the people became silent and sullen and disappointed. In fact, they began to resent Jesus for making fools of them. Hadn't they shouted and cheered and welcomed him as King? What a waste of time and energy. What a waste of palm branches!

The days passed and the people continued to grumble and sulk. By Friday they were seething with resentment. And so, when Jesus was arrested and Pilate asked the crowds what to do with him, they shouted *again* at the top of their lungs. But this time, they didn't shout "Hosannah," they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" And a few hours later, Jesus was hanging, lifeless, on a cross.

Here in the 21st century, we know that everything that occurred on that first Palm Sunday, that first Maundy Thursday and that first Good Friday *had* to happen. Jesus had to ride into Jerusalem and be welcomed with cheers and praises; the people had to change their minds about him; he had to be arrested, crucified and buried. Those things had to take place so that Jesus could rise again on Easter morning – and prove that he really is the greatest King ever. There was no other way for God to show the world how precious we are. There was no other way to remove the barrier that separated us from the God who loves us so dearly. There was no other way to win the victory over death.

But even though we *know* that Jesus really *did* deserve a King's welcome when he rode into Jerusalem; even though we know he deserves praise and honor every single *day*, we don't always give it to him, do we? Most of the time we aren't shouting, "Hosannah!" Our cloaks stay hanging in the closet and our palm leaves are tucked behind a picture frame and left to dry.

When was the last time there was pandemonium in this building, for example? When did we last *cheer* for Jesus? Maybe it was *last* Palm Sunday. Maybe it was even longer ago. But the truth is, praising Jesus and giving him the honor he deserves doesn't *have* to be noisy. It certainly can be – after all, the Bible encourages us to "make a joyful noise to the Lord" (Psalm 98:4a) – but it doesn't have to be. In fact, one of the best ways of praising and honoring Jesus is by using the gifts God gave us to continue Christ's work in the world.

Are you a member of the Vestry, a front desk minister, or a Sunday School teacher? Do you sing in the choir or play an instrument? Have you joined the team on a spring-cleaning day or washed the linens or polished the brass? Then, in your own way, you *are* shouting: *Hosannah, Lord, Hosannah!*

Are you a Eucharistic Minister or a Minister of Presence or a Minister of Hospitality? Do you serve as acolyte, lector, or usher? Have you cooked for the Men's Just Supper, or hosted a coffee hour or prepared a meal for our Comfort Food ministry? Then *you* are shouting: *Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!*

Do you work in Chapter Two, or the Food Pantry or in the Memorial Garden? Do you help distribute Thanksgiving baskets, or Giving Tree gifts? Do you support the church financially? Do you pray for our community, our nation and the world? Every one of these acts is a shout of praise: *Hosanna in the highest!*

Our Vestry planning retreat in February was dedicated to the spiritual growth of this parish – as we worked together to produce the "Faithful Steps" booklet we distributed at the beginning of Lent. And I know that many of you are making exciting spiritual discoveries using that booklet. I also know that many of you have been surprised at just how simple many of those steps are.

Every single contribution we make to the life of our parish, and to our ministry in the world – no matter how mundane or practical it may appear – when it's offered wholeheartedly, it's an act of praise and honor to our King.

Whatever your gifts may be, however you use them in the service of God, whether or not I mentioned them in my list, they *are* important. They are palm branches lifted high to welcome the Lord Jesus into our life on a daily basis. They are cloaks laid down under his feet. And they are *thunderous* shouts of praise that reach all the way to heaven!