

PALM SUNDAY COMMENTARY
Matthew 21:1-11 in light of the Passion History

You've seen, whether on video or in person, the military parades during World War 2 or the Cold War. If it was an American parade, you might have swelled with pride and patriotism. If it was the parade of one of our enemies, you might have felt a bit awed and maybe even intimidated. The parades were intended to be stirring, to instill a sense of wonder at the power of the state. Yet none of that today.

The King enters Jerusalem. He has no tank or limousine. He rides a rental donkey. There's not well-placed tickertape or regalia. The crowd's reaction is spontaneous and spur of the moment. They grab palms, a symbol of victory, and strew the road with their own garments.

It is hard not to imagine the Apostles' chests puffing up a bit, their chin held a little higher than normal, as they could say to those they met, "I'm with Him." This was the day they had been waiting for. This was the pay off for trudging around Israel with Jesus. Now they were going to be superstars.

But you know what happened. But a few days later their puffed up chests were deflated like a balloon, popped by the nails that pierced their Master's hands and feet. This was not the coronation they expected, as their King was crowned with thorns. This was not the throne they expected, as He ascended the cross. And when Peter faced that crucial moment, faced it three times, he answered, no longer in pride but now in fear, "***I'm not with Him.***"

Palm Sunday is an odd mixture of sentiments for the Christian. We are happy for Jesus. He is finally getting the praise He deserves. We swell with pride as our King enters Jerusalem as a King, welcomed for once, welcomed with such excitement that the whole city was astir, asking "***Who is this Jesus?***" And for once the crowds get it right. "***He is the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.***"

If only they knew, however, what prophecy held for this Prophet: namely, a turn of events like the world has never seen

before or ever will see again, as the One riding a beast of burden will become a beast of burden Himself, bearing your sins on His back, not so that you might bring them with you where He wants to take you, but that you should never see them again.

“Hosanna,” they shout today, **“Lord, save us”** in Hebrew. And He will save them, even as many of these same adoring fans will turn into bloodthirsty enemies on Good Friday, shouting **“Crucify”** instead. And He will be crucified, and it is precisely by being crucified that He will save them, that He will save you.

How’s your Hebrew. I want you to be fluent before you leave today. It’s going to be a long service, you know. No, I don’t want you to be fluent in all of the language, but I do want you to be fluent in the language of faith, summed up in this one beautiful Hebrew word, **“Hosanna.”** Be ready to shout it. Shout it on Maundy Thursday as He invites you to His royal feast and gives you what He will offer on Good Friday: His precious Body and Blood. Shout it on Good Friday as He ascends His throne and decrees by His death what could take place no other place: that we sinners are now His saints through faith. And shout it on Easter Sunday as He emerges from the belly of the earth as the firstfruits of the resurrection in which you too will share should you remain in Him who has made that promise. **“Hosanna,” “Lord, save us,”** because the Lord knows we can’t save ourselves, and that is the point of this week after all.

Today is Palm Sunday. I’m pumped. Are you? You should be. It may not be a military parade, but it ought to be just as stirring, and even more. You know where He’s been. You know where He’s going. Remember why and your chest won’t be able to hold your heart as it beats with the ecstatic joy of forgiveness and swells with the unfathomable breadth of God’s love. **“Hosanna”**—sew it onto your lips in the days to come, and don’t for a minute doubt that He will do just that, that He will save us, because He is Jesus after all, whose name means **“He who saves.”** Amen.