

**Homily**  
**Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene**  
**Palm Sunday**  
**Sunday, March 24, 2024**  
**10am**

Text: Mark 11:1-11

Theme: Parading Toward Darkness

[prayer]

Holy Week is a time to reflect on the genuine nature of love.

The author James Baldwin had this to say about love – or at least, the inability to love:

*It doesn't make any difference  
whether you can't love a woman,  
or can't love a man —  
if you can't love anybody,  
you're dangerous.  
Because you've no way  
of learning humility.  
No way of learning  
that other people suffer.  
No way of learning  
how to use your suffering,  
and theirs, to get from one place  
to another.*

*In short, you fail the human  
responsibility, which is  
to love each other.<sup>1</sup>*

Jesus had his parables and discourses and Sermon on the Mount, but love was his most potent lesson. And Holy Week is his masterclass on love.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2024/3/9/james-baldwin-on-love>

Jesus entered Jerusalem as a political figure whose celebrity had peaked. Imagine a political rally: rope lines, cheering crowds, the red-carpet treatment. Most of the people gathered that day had only heard stories about Jesus, and this was their first time seeing him in person. The experience was euphoric. The prophet Zechariah said,

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion.  
Sing aloud, Daughter Jerusalem.  
Look, your king will come to you.  
He is righteous and victorious.  
He is humble and riding on an ass,  
on a colt, the offspring of a donkey” (Zech 9:9).

Right before their very eyes Jesus was fulfilling the ancient prophecies about the Messiah, and the people fell in love with him for it. When we fall in love, we project the most noble parts of ourselves onto another human being. If you have experienced romantic love, you can probably recall those first few giddy weeks and months when your beloved could do no wrong. They were perfect in your sight. But over time, the euphoria faded and the truth of the person in front of you emerged. That truth was more complex. Romantic love lies a little. Infatuation edits reality. If we are wise and discerning, the complexity of the truth will sometimes lead us to a richer and more lasting experience of love. But not always.

The people thought they loved Jesus. In truth, they loved the *idea* of Jesus. He represented a very specific vision of the future. But when he demonstrated that he was not interested in fulfilling that vision, the people’s love evaporated.

After Jesus made his way into Jerusalem, he gathered with his disciples around a table. They broke bread and shared a cup of wine. And then Jesus said this: “This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13 CEB).

This is Jesus’ definition of love: Love is willing to suffer, to sacrifice, even to die for another person.

This is not an abstract teaching. We believe that God is love. And what did God do? God paraded into Jerusalem, right past the Temple and onto a cross. The honored Jesus became the humiliated Jesus.

The people's love for Jesus was superficial. But Jesus's love for the people was not. Jesus's love was willing to withstand the horrors of the crucifixion.

The disciples resisted the full revelation of God in Jesus because that revelation included great suffering. It scared them. It should scare us, too. If it doesn't, then we are no different than the Jerusalem crowds. Truthfully, we commit the greater sin because we know how this story ends. We know Jesus is parading toward darkness. But so often we want to jump from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday and skip right over Good Friday, when Good Friday is where Jesus asks us to go.

The masterclass in love lies at the foot of the cross. Each of us will face our own Good Fridays, where the shadow of suffering and death looms large over our lives. It is in those dark places that our superficial love is stripped away, and a richer, more lasting love emerges – love that “trusts in all things, hopes for all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:7).

Joni Mitchell sang: *I've looked at love from both sides now / From give and take, and still somehow / It's love's illusions I recall / I really don't know love at all.*<sup>2</sup>

We begin Holy Week with this confession: We really don't know love. If we did, we wouldn't retell this story year after year. We are still trying to grasp what it means to follow a God who was crucified. Palm Sunday reminds us that we misunderstand God's love for us. We also misunderstand our love for God. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments...[and] this is my commandment: Love each other just as I have loved you” (John 14:15; 15:12). The measure of our love for God is not found in our praise and acclamation. It is found in our love for each other – not superficial love, but love that shares the passion of our Lord.

Today, as we begin our annual pilgrimage to the cross, we ask for the humility to be good students of Love. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXr2EFomFkU>