



A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
by The Reverend Andrew Van Culin, *Rector*

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday (Year C)
10 April 2022

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So we Americans have our ways of celebrating, and our things worthy of our celebration. We have just had over the course of this new year, already we have had several forms of ticker tape parades. We've cut down nets for March Madness. We've watched women and men strut across a red carpet in front of the scores of photographers flashing as they capture their pictures. We've had ticker tape parades, literally for Super Bowl Champions and NCAA football champions. We have seen and celebrated astronauts into space, and we hear over and over and over again the telling of the story of those who become rich and famous in various ways. We have our things that we celebrate. And yet we stand today with another celebration, in our midst. We stand with our own palm branches, our own confetti if you will, to celebrate another life story. It is the story of course of Jesus.

Now some will say that we should be waiting. We should wait one more week to offer our praise for then the story is complete. Then on that Easter day, we get to celebrate life in God's victory over death. Yes, we will celebrate again. But today's celebration, today's lifting of our voice with Hosannas and praise is, I dare say a more important celebration for us on this side of the grave. For in fact, we have to choose which life we celebrate. All those years back when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, we are reminded that there were in fact two processions being held. Perhaps not on that same day though. very possibly on that day. There would've been one procession. The procession of Pilate entering into Jerusalem as Pilate would always have done on the Passover. Pilate would've come into Jerusalem not to participate in the Passover, but to show himself for the Passover. Pilate would've come in with all the signs and symbols that society has always celebrated. He would've come in on a glorious war horse. Large and powerful, flanked by soldiers.



With all the symbols of Roman power and wealth around him and before him. He would've celebrated that week. He would've brought the elite of Roman society and Jewish society into his palace to celebrate and to feast. He would've shown himself to be all that society dreams of. Powerful, luxurious, wealthy, influential, famous. And on the other side of town, another procession begins. Here is Jesus. Coming instead on a simple young colt. A donkey, perhaps. Not a beast of burden and strength. Not a war horse of power and might. But a humble animal. Coming in humbly into Jerusalem. Illustrating that there is in fact, if you choose it another way. And over the course of this Holy Week, we will see that other way on display. But let me remind you of what it is. We will see Jesus enter into Jerusalem in fact, a couple of times. He will come into Jerusalem today. He will return to Bethany at night and then come back to Jerusalem, and back to Bethany. In and out a couple of times. And on one of those journeys, He will come across a fig tree. You may recall this story.

He'll come across a fig tree and you'll recall it's not the season of the fig, but He's hungry. And the fig tree is without any figs. A disappointment. And so Jesus curses that fig tree. And then He continues his journey into Jerusalem, as I believe it's Matthew's Gospel who tells it this way. He continues his journey into Jerusalem. He comes into the temple. A place that's far more grand and glorious even than this holy place. And He finds it filled, it's courtyards filled, it's cloisters and hallways filled with money changers, changing and exchanging all of the currency of the empire. And while they're doing it, taking a little too much for themselves and turning that holy place into a den of thieves and robbers. And in righteous anger with all of the force of his strength, He turns over those tables and scares and grabs a flog and begins to chase out all of those money changers. All of those who had defile the temple. Now that doesn't sound, neither of those stories sounds like a story of Jesus, does it?

We expect Jesus to be passive and peaceful and humble and meek. But there in those two stories we are demonstrated the very power that Jesus possessed. The very power I dare say, that humanity possesses. The ability to use our power for destruction. The one, the cursing of the fig tree reveals that God possesses the power to destroy. The money changers and the cleansing of the temple, that Jesus, the man, possesses the power to destroy. If you ever want a little exploration come to the chapel here, you see the window closest to the chapel altar, the Holy Week window. And you'll see Jesus there with the flog in his hand and his eyes, large enraged. An image of Jesus we don't admit. But this story is there to remind us that Jesus and God possess this same power. The power that you and I possess within our bodies and within our hearts. We may not use it the same way, the power to destroy. But it's there. With words that we say of one another.



The tone of our voice toward one another. The way we use our wealth, our influence to build ourselves up at the expense of others. This story of Holy Week reveals not only that Jesus possesses the power, but that He will lay it down as well. For the story continues. The story, the great story of the Triduum that Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday story is the story of Jesus choosing another way. Saying to the powers of the world, to the way of Pontius Pilate of wealth, of power, of authority and of fame, "That will not be my way." And so we hear Jesus choose another way. It is the way that our youth have just read us through. The way of mercy. "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do." The way of absorption. That willingness to suffer out of love for the other. We do that so naturally for those whom we hold most dear to our hearts. What parent hasn't suffered out of love for their child? What spouse or partner or lover hasn't suffered out of love for another?

What dear friend hasn't laid down part of their life to make room for a dear friend who is suffering or struggling and not their best self in that moment out of love for another? Jesus lays down the way of violence, lays down the way of power, lays down the way of wealth and fame. And takes up the way of grace, the way of love, the way of mercy, the way of suffering out of love for another. Our world celebrates many things. It celebrates them on festivals, it celebrates them on championships, it celebrates them every week, every day in the news. We hear a story of wealth or power or fame or success to celebrate. But we come today to praise another story. To lift our Hosannas to the story of Jesus, to the way of Jesus. We come not just this day, but week in, week out to combat that story that is so insidious in our mind that says, 'You must do it all yourself through your power and your accumulation."

We do it week in and week out to be reminded that there is another way to sing, another story to praise. Today, we do it with palm branches and praises of Hosanna. Let this be the story of praise, the praise of our heart today and all this. Amen.