

*Living from the Lord's Prayer, Pt. 6*  
***Deliver Us from Evil***  
*Ephesians 6: 10-13*

**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**Palm Sunday, April 9, 2017  
Gerrit Scott Dawson**

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This is one of my favorite Sundays of the year. We are all together, packed into the sanctuary on a beautiful spring day. It's a day of celebration and fun. It's a day when we leave the walls of our sanctuary and go out into the streets to sing and speak our faith. We make a public demonstration that I hope will raise both interest and important questions. I hope some conversations get started between parents and children. Maybe some will even go like this:

"Dad, why do we all get palm branches at church?"

"Because it's Palm Sunday, silly!"

"No, Dad, tell me *why*. Why do we wave palms?"

"Well, it's a very old practice! It's sort of like cheering at a parade. Or waving a towel at a game in Tiger stadium. For years and years and years, people have waved palm branches when heroes pass by. It's a way to cheer them. It's a way to honor them."

"But we're not at Tiger Stadium. Why do we wave palm branches at *church*?"

"We're having a celebration of the day Jesus came to the great and holy city of Jerusalem. When he came into the city, all the people cheered him as a hero. They waved palm branches and shouted a word of praise: *Hosanna!* It means, "God saves us!"

"But Jesus isn't really here! I know that guy in the robe was Mr. Darin Travis. I know one of his daughters! He's not really Jesus."

"You're right! We're remembering something that happened long ago. We're remembering it with a big celebration so we can feel the joy that people felt back then when it did happen."

"Is that like a birthday? When you give me presents even though I didn't really get born the day I turned 9?"

"Exactly. You are a clever child. We remember the day you were born. And we're so thankful God put you into the world that every year, on the same day, we remember and we celebrate."

"So why did people celebrate when Jesus came to Jerusalem? Was it his birthday?"

“No, his birthday is at Christmas. The people celebrated Jesus because they had been waiting for God to send a king who would rule over us to make everything right again. They realized that Jesus was that king. For just a few hours, they realized that Jesus is God’s Son, the king we’ve all been waiting for. And they were filled with joy.”

“But don’t kings have thrones? And ride in chariots? And have all kinds of soldiers in armor around them? Why did Jesus ride on a donkey? I saw the donkey today and he doesn’t look very kingly!”

“You’re right again. Donkeys are very humble animals. They can be stubborn. They’re not grand like big horses. Jesus rode on a donkey because he was a different kind of king. The Scriptures even predicted it. A long time before Jesus, a prophet said, “Your king will come to you, humble and riding on a donkey” (Zech. 9:9).

“But Jesus is the great King. I want him to be in a chariot and go to a palace! Why did he have to be so humble?”

“He wanted to show us a different way to live. He is the King who washes the feet of his disciples. He is the powerful ruler who hangs out with the poor and the weak. He is the Lord of love who defeats evil by showing mercy.”

“It seems like Palm Sunday would have been really fun!”

“Oh yes, there was great joy. Everyone realized that Jesus was the Savior they waited for. He was the king who would make the world right again. Kids climbed trees and shouted down to him. People cut palm branches and waved them. Others put their coats on the ground to make a royal path for Jesus. It was a great celebration.”

“But Dad, I have another question. We read about this in Sunday school. The Bible says that when Jesus was on the hill looking down on the city, he cried. If this was such a happy day, why did Jesus cry?”

“You are full of great questions! Yes, Palm Sunday is a day that is both happy and sad at the same time. It’s a happy sad day. Happy because for a few hours, people realized Jesus was king. Sad, because Jesus knew what would happen at the end of the week?”

“What would happen?”

“The people would turn against Jesus. The same people who shouted, “Hosanna! Hail to King Jesus” would by this Friday shout, “Crucify him!”

“That’s terrible! I would never do that!”

“I hope not, little one. I hope I wouldn’t either. But good people sometimes think wrong things. We get tricked. We turn against people we love. I’m afraid I might have been part of that evil crowd.”

“Dad, have you ever done evil? I mean, you’re so good and smart, how could you ever get tricked into doing something so bad?”

“Well, I wasn’t very old the first time it happened. I got lured into evil just like a fish takes the bait on a hook. Someone made me feel like I had been done wrong. And he tempted me to make it right, to get what I deserved. My criminal record actually begins at age 5. In kindergarten.”

“What? You were a criminal? Tell me, tell me!”

“It was the last day of school before the Christmas break. We were having a gift exchange. Everyone brought a wrapped gift. We put them all in a big basket. Then we each got to draw out a gift. My mom and I had been to the toy store the day before. We got a really cool army set, with jeeps and tanks. I wished I could get my own present, because it was really good. The present I got was not really good. It was totally cheap and totally stupid. I sat in my chair thinking about the army set in comparison to what I got.

Then a voice said in my ear, “Didn’t get what you want, did you?” It was my friend David Madlone. He had sidled up to me, and was speaking in a quiet voice. “No,” I said, “I got this dumb bubble set.” “That’s not right,” David said, shaking his head. “It’s not fair.” David was speaking the truth. Some kid was going home to play with my amazing army set and I had this dinky gift. “Why don’t you do what I did?” I looked at him. “What?” “Just take some of the toys from here. It’s easy. Just put a couple in your bag and you can enjoy them over Christmas. It’s only fair. You got gypped. So just take what you want and make it right.” It made sense to me. It was surprisingly easy. I just put some stuff from the school toy box into my bag and brought it home. It was only fair, right?

“Within two hours my mother had hauled me back to school. The teachers were still cleaning up for the holiday. I gave back the stuff. I said I was sorry. I knew that it was wrong. We never talked about it again. But I was ashamed. In the light of being caught, I realized how ridiculous I was being. Stealing is wrong. And I had no need to steal. I had plenty of toys. My evil began with a trick. Someone told me, ‘You deserve more. You got robbed in the gift exchange, so rob the school and make it even. It’s only fair.’ And I believed the lie. And then I did wrong. Good thing I got caught.”

“Dad, you could have become like a gangster or something.”

“There’s not much difference between the best people and the worst people. We all have evil in our hearts. Any one of us who waved palms for Jesus might have turned against him by Friday.”

“That’s really scary. No wonder Jesus cried. Palm Sunday really is happy/sad.”

“Yes. Palm Sunday is a day of joy. But it’s on the edge of a week of sadness. Our King has come to us. He’s going to his throne. But his throne is not in a palace. His throne is the rough wood of the cross.’

“What?”

“Yes, Jesus did not go to the glory of the palace in Jerusalem. He was enthroned on the cross as the King who gave his life for his servants. He took all our evil on himself. He conquers death by dying.”

“So even though we turned against him, and sent him to the cross, he didn’t stop being king?”

“No, he’s the King of kings and Lord of lords. It looked like evil had won. It looked like death beat him. It looked like our wicked hearts had killed the Jesus who loves us. But the cross wasn’t the end of the story.”

“I know what happened! He rose from the dead! That was on Easter!”

“Absolutely. King Jesus who died on the cross got up from the dead. His Father raised him, never to die again. And when we believe in him, he gives us his resurrection life. He forgives all our sins. He puts his Spirit in us. He gives us power to fight against what is wrong with love.”

“I do believe in him!”

“I know you do. That’s why we can celebrate on Palm Sunday and feel the joy. We tell the story over and over so we can remember what a big price Jesus paid to save us. And as we think about this Friday coming up, when everybody turned against Jesus, we can remember what he taught us to pray.”

“What’s that?”

“Deliver us from evil. It means, save me from forgetting about you. Don’t let me be tricked by lies so I do what is wrong. Don’t let the bad win. Deliver us from evil.”

“That’s a big story, Dad.”

“Yeah it is. It’s the biggest story ever. The most important story. The truest story. That’s why we tell it every year. So we can feel it again and believe in Jesus more and more. Now look, it’s just about time for some crawfish!”