



## BLESSED IS THE KING... CRUCIFY HIM!

March 20, 2016, Palm/Passion Sunday

Luke 19:28-40; 23:13-25

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Theme: The two parades of Holy Week reflect the whole truth about both Christ and our lives.

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*Give us the sharp eyes and keen ears, O God, to see and hear the whole story, even the parts we'd sooner miss. Give us hearts stout enough to follow our Lord every step of His way, even when we come to the places we'd sooner pass by. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.*

“Everybody loves a parade,” they say. Don’t believe it. When he was a very little boy, our son hated parades. He said the clowns were creepy, and when the VFW stopped in the middle of the street to shoot off their vintage howitzer, he covered his ears and ran in the other direction. Smart boy!

Nevertheless, I think he would have loved the *first* Holy Week parade, the one we heard about in the first of the two passages Will read a moment ago – the parade where they called out “*Blessed is the king...*” We all love this first parade, love it so much that we – together with a couple billion other Christians around the globe – reenact it annually. We who live in northerly places order bundles of scandalously overpriced palm fronds. We sing the same old bouncy Palm Sunday hymns. The children’s procession lines up in the chapel and marches in. Eight-year-old boys have their annual palm frond sword fights. We’ve got babes in arms and wide-eyed toddlers and eleven-year-olds who are way too cool for all this. Together we call out one of the most joyous words in all the Bible, “*Hosanna.*” Hosanna is an ancient Hebrew acclamation, the word people shouted out to a



beloved leader as he passed by. Actually, “*Hosanna*” is what they shout in the *other* three Gospels. But as you just heard Will read, in Luke they cry out, “*Blessed is the King!*” Either way, this first parade is vibrant celebration. The King of Love entered the city back then; the King of Love emblematically enters the city of our lives today. And when love incarnate rides into your city, it’s time for a parade.

Remember that this first parade was something of a parody on traditional expectations about how the Messiah was *supposed* to enter Jerusalem. Everybody figured he would enter at the head of a victorious army. Everybody pictured him mounted on a powerful stallion. Everybody assumed that the hated Romans, or whatever oppressor *du jour* occupied Jerusalem, would already be on the run.

But here comes a very different Messiah – not a military victor, but a teacher from upstate armed with mercy, his feet dragging on the ground as he sits astride a little borrowed donkey. Behind him march his battalions – a motley crew of Galilean fishermen, run-away women, and a repentant tax collector. You can’t but love the irony implicit in this parade.

And you can’t help but like it better than the next parade. Yes, there are two parades to remember today. Today’s the only hyphenated holiday in the Christian year. It’s not just Palm Sunday; it’s also Passion Sunday. Passion Sunday remembers what will unfold in the dread days to come, Thursday and Friday especially. At this second parade, the one from the place of Jesus’ trial to the place of His execution, nobody shouted, “*Blessed is the king.*” Rather, they sent him on his way crying out, “*Crucify him.*” And after that, there was silence, silence save for the sound of the bottom of the cross as it grated and thumped over the paving stones of the streets of Jerusalem. Now, all these centuries later, we who would follow him are called to remember both parades.

But imagine something crazy with me. Imagine if we remembered *only* the first parade, the “*Blessed is the king*” parade. Imagine this – wouldn’t it have been a tidier story if it had simply ended with the first parade? Think about it – what a



perfect Hollywood ending. Imagine it – if Palm Sunday were the only parade, this is how the Jesus story would have gone:

*“Small town spiritual teacher struggles to rise from obscure origins. At first, only a few people recognize his genius. He meets some resistance from the religious powers of the day, those pompous Pharisees and nit-picking scribes, perfect cinema villains, by the way. But the young teacher persists, and finally, in the last scene, he makes it to the big city. And there, to everybody’s surprise, he’s greeted with wild and popular acclaim. He’s finally recognized as the religious genius he is. He lives in the big city to a ripe old age, gathers more followers and starts a school to carry on his ideas. After his peaceful death in old age, they write books about him so that, years later, people can read his wise words.”*

If that were the story line, Palm Sunday would be *the* big day in the Christian calendar. We’d remember only the first parade. Everybody would come to church and shout “*Hosanna*” or “*Blessed is the king.*” Today, Palm Sunday, would be the really big Christian holiday of the year. We’d remember Jesus as another wise and successful teacher; then we would all go home and wait for the next big day, Christmas.

*But it just would not have gone deep enough.* Rough and raw, mystifying and incredible though the next seven days are, for two thousand years Christians have stubbornly refused to end the story with the happy parade. *Both* parade stories are remembered by every branch of Christian faith on the globe. In our service of worship today, the movement will be from Palm to Passion, the first two lively major key hymns and then the minor key brooding recessional hymn at the end of this service.

The deep truth is this: the Palm Sunday parade into the city and the Passion Sunday parade to the cross stand together as emblems of the whole range of both Jesus’ experience and the whole range of our human experience. The two of them hold in their narrative hands the height and the depth of the whole truth. One without the



other is only half the truth.

It's like this – there *are* Palm Sunday days of joy in our own lives. The sun shines, so to speak; the road rises to meet our feet; all things good and true, sweet and savory seem to rule life. On these Palm Sunday days, God is in God's heaven and all rests well on this lovely terrestrial sphere. Life is full of such days, thank God, Palm Sunday days when the truth shines bright and clear. Palm Sunday days when some mess in your life unravels itself just the right way. Palm Sunday days when you witness an act of unnecessary kindness or unaccountable courage. Palm Sunday days when your dad recovers from the major heart attack. Palm Sunday days when the young mother next door beats breast cancer. Palm Sunday days when your 17-year-old nephew finally kicks his drug habit.

These days are real, thank God. On that first Palm Sunday a gentle rabbi who preached love for God and neighbor really was greeted with shouts of acclamation and waving palm fronds. Life is full of such dance-and-shout, "*Hosanna, loud hosanna*" days. I've known them and so have you.

But not all our days are so. There are also Passion Sunday days in our lives. You doubtless remember yours only too well. Maybe one of them is all too close to you this morning. Passion Sunday days when a dear friend dies too young from cancer. Passion Sunday days when you're told that your job is being eliminated. Passion Sunday days when the phone rings and one parent tells you through tears that the other died in the night. Passion Sunday days when for no good reason, your heart is heavy as a lead ingot.

The point is that each parade – the joyous Palm Sunday parade and the sober Passion Sunday parade to the cross – each one reflects not only what actually took place, but each reflects the deepest truth about the range of the human experience. If the story ended on Palm Sunday, if we settled for the Hollywood ending, if that were the *only* parade, *the story of Jesus Christ would simply not go to the depths to which life goes.*



The second parade reminds us that the love and presence of God go with us as deep as life goes. God goes before us, and God will be with us through the darkest and hardest walks that might come to us in life. There's nothing that can come to us that Christ has not already known. In Christ, God has passed through it before us. He has seen the depths of every depth that we might ever come to pass through.

So we have a two-parade faith, a Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday Christianity. This faith of ours stubbornly remembers that our own life parade passes through both bright meadows and valleys-of-the-shadow. There are two parades because the Christian faith goes every bit as high as life goes and Christian faith goes every bit as deep as life goes. You can't end the story with that first parade. But, of course, the story does not end with the second parade, the passion parade. That's the story for next Sunday.

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*