

Hosanna- Palm Sunday

When was the last time you attended a parade? For me, it was the Potomac Day Parade this past Fall **(PICTURE)** when we walked down River Road passing out our PPC Grocery bags and candy to parade watchers. It is an annual tradition here at the church and a wonderful way to be part of our Potomac Community each October. A lot happens at this event. There are booths with local businesses and organizations here in Potomac to promote what they do, a kids section with moon bounces, obstacle courses, and rock climbing walls, and plenty of food and drinks to go around.

From our perspective, it is a pretty simple process to take part in the parade. Jan signs us up for a spot, we arrive in the morning to set up our hospitality table, line up, walk together and are done shortly after to either stay and enjoy the festivities or head home. But, have you ever stopped to think about how much planning goes into making a parade and event like that happen?

Potomac Day is not nearly as complex as say the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade, but there is so much happening behind the scenes to make even a small parade a success. You've got to select the weekend and promote the event to get enough buzz and people there to make it worthwhile. There are 70 or so different schools, businesses, community groups, houses of worship, and politicians who sign up to walk in the parade and/or have a booth- so you must communicate with them to make sure the day runs smoothly. You need fun activities for kids, funds to pay for it all, permission from businesses to use their parking lots and their bathrooms, police help to shut down the roads during the parade, and so many more steps that most of us are not even aware of... From an outsider point of view, we just show up and take part in the festivities. For those who plan these big events, it is a completely different story. This makes it all the more surprising then, when we hear of a parade that had very little prep, and yet captivated those in attendance.

(HOLY WEEK) Here at the church, we are in the final stretch of Lent as Easter is just around the corner. Today marks the beginning of Holy week, which is a time when we journey with our Savior through his final moments on earth. We begin with Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem this morning, will celebrate his last meal on Thursday, remember his death on Friday, and celebrate his resurrection next Sunday on Easter. It is our hope that you will experience all that this Holy Week has to offer with us at Potomac Presbyterian Church as we seek to slow down and Show Up for God. **(SERMON SLIDE)**

To kick off the week, we begin by recalling the Palm Sunday story of Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. We heard Chidi describe this occasion from Mark's perspective, detailing that Jesus rode into Jerusalem atop a colt as people spread their cloaks and branches along the path for him. They shouted Hosanna and it was a joyful parade-like event. This is a familiar story to many of us and it can be challenging to hear it with fresh ears year after year. Today, however, I invite you to ponder what might be a new way to read the story.

Often, when I see images of the Palm Sunday story, it will look something like this. **(PICTURE)** Now, I am by no means bashing this image or calling out whoever created it, but notice how neat, well laid out, and organized the entrance into Jerusalem appears. There is a clear and smooth path, people are respectfully standing off to the sides, and everyone depicted seems to be

there for Jesus. While this is very helpful to paint a picture for what this might have looked like, scripture describes the event a bit differently.

(SERMON SLIDE) Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem wasn't a well-organized and planned out event like Potomac Day. Instead, it was all done at the last minute. The passage began by saying that as they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, he sent out two of his disciples to find a colt for him to ride on. We can tell that there wasn't any pre-planning involved through many context clues. The first is when bystanders were surprised that someone was taking the colt, showing that there was no arranging for this ahead of time. One might have expected an important figure to ride into town on a horse, high above the crowd. Yet, the only means of transportation available was a colt or young donkey, which wasn't even fully grown. When the crowd gathered, they had to run to nearby fields for leafy branches or take their cloaks off and lay them on the path for Jesus. They didn't appear to have time to fix up the road, as they weren't given much if any notice of Jesus' arrival. Suffice to say, all of this was done at the last minute.

I was curious as to how much time the disciples and crowd might have had to prepare for Jesus' triumphal entrance and discovered something interesting. **(PICTURE)** The passage talked about these two places, Bethphage and Bethany, and stated that when Jesus and his followers were there, they went off to prepare for Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. As you can see, Bethphage and Bethany were immediately outside the city of Jerusalem. In fact, if you can see the map scale at the bottom right, they were within a mile or two of the city and temple. It would be like walking from here to the Giving Garden just down the road. Meaning, the event that we celebrate today was something that was pulled together when they were less than an hour away from their destination.

Anyone in the event planning business would probably be shaking in their boots if they had this little time to get ready. If the disciples knew we would be talking about this event 2000 years in the future, I am positive that they would have wanted more time to lay out a proper red carpet for Jesus. Surely, Jesus and the disciples had travelled quite far and had a lot of time to get ready for this event along the way. This year, after spending some time with the story once again, I am left pondering why they did it all at seemingly the last minute.

Perhaps this is just something within our human nature. How many of us have put something off until the last minute before? Be it homework, a work project, an email, that text we don't want to reply to, that chore that we keep putting off, the presentation coming up, a sermon that needs writing, our taxes, or a bill that needs to be paid- we have a propensity to wait until the last minute to prepare and get ready. I experience this all the time, as it is much easier to put something off until you are down to the wire than to do it properly in advance. When it comes to our faith, we can fall into the same trap too.

Many of us may have even fallen for it with Lent this year. We might have wanted to slow down and Show Up for God, but too many things got in the way. Now, when we look up the sanctuary is decked out in Palms and Easter is nearly here. Like the disciples who were sent out less than a couple miles away from Jerusalem, there is not much time left to get ready for Easter. But the Good News is that Jesus can do something spectacular, even with last minute preparation and despite our own procrastination.

The story of Palm Sunday reminds us that Jesus didn't need all the bells and whistles that other leaders of his time desired when they were entering a city. We call it the triumphal entrance, but there wasn't a whole lot that was over the top or extravagant. **(PICTURE)** He didn't prepare a grand chariot, with legions of troops or his followers leading the way as Roman Emperors would back in his time. His parade into Jerusalem wasn't spectacular by conventional means and it didn't need to be. The true spectacle was found in who he was and what his arrival in the city meant to the people that were there.

Let's turn to scripture and see what meaning his entrance had... **(SCRIPTURE)**

As Jesus was making his way toward Jerusalem scripture describes that, "...those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

These joyful shouts from the crowd bring us to the true message of Palm Sunday. The people exclaim Hosanna, which means save us Lord. In saying this, they recognized Jesus as the Messiah and greeted him in joy. They knew that his arrival into Jerusalem meant something. In their eyes, the Messiah was the one who would reestablish the Kingdom of David and free the people from oppression. This was the moment, and this was the place where they might have thought that all scripture and prophecy was coming to a climax.

When we encounter this story for the first time, our instinct may well be like that of the crowd. But as is often the case with Jesus, something unexpected happened. The passage ends like this: **(SCRIPTURE)** "Then he (Jesus) entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve."

What? Where is the new kingdom of heaven? When does Jesus save the people and answer their hosannas? Where is the all-powerful Messiah that we expected? Do you mean Jesus parades into Jerusalem, enters the temple, looks around, and then goes to sleep? Is that really how Palm Sunday ends? Well, yes.

Those who had an extra cup of coffee this morning might remember that Bethany is where Jesus had just come from. Recall that it was at Bethphage and Bethany that Jesus sent out the two disciples to find a colt. So the climax of the story is that Jesus returns to the place he came from and perhaps returns the colt that he borrowed along the way. It's really an anti-climax when we stop to think about it.

If we look at the titles for the next few sections of Mark 11, we see that in the days to come after this parade, Jesus will curse a fig tree, cleanse the temple, explain the fig tree's withering, and have his authority questioned. This is a surprising way to wrap up the passage and chapter, but it proves an important point. The story doesn't end here. **(SERMON SLIDE)**

Palm Sunday is just the beginning. Throughout this week, we are going to hear, experience, and marvel at the key events that took place leading up to the actual climax. Today, we take time to slow down and pause at the first part of the narrative to find Jesus entering into Jerusalem with minimal planning and the people shouting Hosanna, save us. Today we sing: "All Glory, Laud, and

Honor”, “Ride On! Ride On in Majesty!”, “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna”. With joyful shouts and palms waving we welcome Jesus, our Savior, into Jerusalem and into our midst, as the crowd did long ago.

This is the story of how God so loved the world that He sent his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. This is the one who says Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. This is a compelling story that is worth retelling over and over again. This is something that the whole world needs to hear.

Whether we have been preparing all throughout Lent, or are pulling things together at the last minute, the invitation is there from our Lord to experience something spectacular this Holy Week. The challenge is to slow down and embrace all that this week and this story has to offer as we think about what our Lord did for us and what our faith means to us. Hosanna! Amen.





