



Palm Sunday  
Sermon by Pastor Paisley Le Roy  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St. Charles  
March 28, 2021

Each year on the Passover, people would flock to Jerusalem. It's said the city's population would quadruple in size for the holiday. And, with so many people present at once and in light of what Passover commemorates, it was the perfect time for the Roman emperor to remind them of their captivity. So, from the west, the emperor would come each year, flanked by his soldiers and guards, and majestic horses. It was a procession much different than today's gospel.

I've often wondered how people got word to gather at the east entrance of the city? Did they rehearse their lines? I wonder how they knew to bring their extra coats to cover the streets? I mean it took multiple Friday blasts, postcards home, a recorded video introduction, an online registration, and so much behind-the-scenes planning to get us in this parking lot today. How did they, without any of this know that Jesus would be marching to Jerusalem that day?

Well, we know that the Jewish people have been long awaiting the Messiah. And, just a couple chapters earlier, when Jesus asks his dearest friends who they thought he was, Peter responds, "you are the Messiah." And though Jesus demanded the disciples not to tell anyone, Jesus' Messiahship, was apparent and word of him was spreading throughout Judea.

And, if the Messiah was really going to save them, surely, he would come on a major Jewish festival as the Roman emperor who demanded their obedience, who demanded their worship...was also present. Afterall, the Messiah was meant to be a militaristic leader that would grant the Jewish people freedom at last.

Then cue Jesus. On a colt. No weapons. A ragtag group of friends.

But what happened next? Well it's quite beautiful. In spite of witnessing this, quite frankly, pathetic site of the long awaited Messiah...*still* something compelled them to sing out that word, "Hosanna," "God, help us." To lay down their garments. To rip foliage from their fields to wave in celebration.

Jesus may not have been what or who they were expecting, but still, Jesus showed up. And, even more, *they* showed up. Because, it was an act of resistance to show up that day. The Empire was there to threaten them and instead, they flocked the gate to welcome the Messiah. Risking their very lives to publicly bear witness to the revolution that was Jesus' entry.

And that is what we remember this day on Palm Sunday - that word of Jesus' teaching, healing, and loving had the power to enact holy resistance. That the entry of a poor, Galilean man bearing nothing and riding on a borrowed colt was, in fact, the Messiah.

He may not have been all they wanted. He did not ride in and overthrow the empire, liberating these oppressed people. But he did fulfill the voice of the prophets in his paradoxical, life out of death, sort of way. And it was more than enough.

Perhaps as we gather together this morning, entering the second Holy Week since COVID kept us physically apart, we, too, feel this desire for more and also the holiness of what is.

And though I'm sure you, like me, would have bigger hopes for this week. We wanted much more this first time back together. We wanted much more for Pastor Jean's "thank you." We wanted much more for our First Communion

students we will celebrate on Thursday. We wanted to sit in the bare sanctuary. We wanted to flock to church on Sunday morning with brass and streamers and bells and lilies. We wanted full tables for Easter brunch.

Indeed, we wanted much, much more out of this “holiest of weeks.”

But still, the whisper of the Spirit brought us to this place, to publicly bear witness, on our corner of the world here in St. Charles. And though, it’s not what we would hope for...it is enough. In fact, it’s probably even more similar to the first Palm Sunday, anxious around gathering with the looming threat of an outside power.

And still...Jesus shows up - both here *and* in our homes...answering our cries for God’s help. Not in the way we would have ever expected but that is the beautiful thing about our God, She works in mysterious ways that are confusing at times but always...*always* bring life out of death.

Debi Thomas says it best, “welcome to Holy Week. Here we are, and here is our God. Here are our hosannas, broken and earnest, hopeful and hungry. Here is all that is unbearable, and all that promises to end in light brighter than we can imagine. Blessed is the One who comes to die so that we will live.”

Amen.