

# PALM SUNDAY | SERMON

Luke 19:28-40 | The Rev. Barnabas Pusnur | St. Paul & the Redeemer | April 10, 2022

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If you see the front cover of your bulletin, you'll notice that we are in a way observing two liturgies today. We are observing Palm Sunday, a celebration of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem; and we are observing the Sunday of the Passion, a painful reminder of Jesus' betrayal by one of his own, his unjust trial, and his crucifixion. So today's service is about both hopeful joy and deep sorrow at the same time. And this experience will mark the rest of this Holy Week.

This week will be a roller coaster ride. We will experience great joy and gladness; we will experience fear and confusion; we will hang by the thread of hope; and we'll see a miracle. We will find God silent when we need him most, we will think God has abandoned us; but we will also experience the power of God in a way that none of us could have imagined. All the range of our humanity will be on display this week. Hope, fear, pain, joy will all be known this week. Our vulnerability will be on full display.

What was it that the followers of Jesus were celebrating? What is it that we are celebrating this morning as we waved palm leaves in our procession outside? The followers were desperately looking for hope. They were looking for God to act and deliver them from oppression they experienced under the Roman Empire. They were seeking better days. And the miracles that Jesus performed gave them hope. They knew God was

working in Jesus and they believed that Jesus would be their leader, their king, who would lead them to victory. And that is why when Jesus came into Jerusalem, they celebrated because for them this was the symbolic beginning of Jesus' work to fulfill their hopes.

Now I think that they might have had all sorts of thoughts as to how Jesus might do this work. I'm speculating here but if I was in that place and time, I would probably think that maybe Jesus' miracles would increase in power to an extent that it would be strong enough to supernaturally challenge the might of the Roman Empire? Or maybe his followers would now come together in Jerusalem and take up swords and be ready for a battle? The followers were probably not sure as to how things were going to occur, but they celebrated in the hope that Jesus is King and through him they will experience deliverance. This morning our liturgy is a celebration of that hope. But the events of this week show how this hope is tested and tried.

Jesus came riding on a donkey, an enactment of the Old Testament imagery of a king coming in peace to his people. Within a few days of his entry to Jerusalem, Jesus would become aware of a plot to betray him. He would start speaking openly about his death. He would say that the greatest is the one who serves. He would show it with the example of washing the disciples' feet. He would predict that his closest disciples would abandon him out of fear for their lives. Knowing of his

imminent torturous death he would pray "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me." And then he would be arrested, tried, and killed on a cross.

I wonder what the people who had just celebrated the arrival of the King in Jerusalem felt at these events. Some may have lost their hope. Many would not have known whether they still had hope. Things had just not worked out the way they had thought. And on top of this it seemed that Jesus had actively embraced these events. He spoke of sacrificing his body and blood while having his last supper with them. He spoke of the greatness of humbling oneself and serving others. He prayed, God "yet, not my will but yours be done." On the cross he said "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

It is extremely hard to keep hope when everything happens in a way opposite to what you thought. It is even harder in this context when the Jesus you had hoped on had embraced this way that was completely different than you thought. Staring at an confusing present and an unknown future, the followers were stunned into silence in the final days of the Holy Week.

At the end of today's liturgy, we will hear the passion story. After we hear of the confusion, pain, & horror in that story we will depart in silence. Having lived through the first Holy Week, the followers of Jesus since then have known that through that silence a mysterious work of God was taking place. In that confusion a power of love unknown before was coming into shape. When all hope seemed to have been lost a new way of

being—a way of service, humility, and compassion was birthing. It was in the Holy Week that a new hope was being unleashed, a hope that would be victorious not only over oppression but even over death.

As we celebrate hope today, I pray that God will keep us in that hope throughout this week. I pray we will persevere in this hope, so that we can witness and participate in the mysterious work of God that happens as we hope. Amen.