

Palm Sunday/ Sunday of the Passion
The Depth of God's Love
Mark 11:1-11

Right up there with Christmas and Easter, Palm Sunday is a day that brings back a lot of memories.

I grew up in a congregation called ***Nazareth Lutheran Church*** in Cedar Falls, Iowa and on Palm Sunday my Sunday School classmates and I would march down the center aisle waving our Palm branches and sing, "*All Glory, Laud, and Honor.*"

I think one of the reasons we enjoy Christmas, Palm Sunday, and Easter is that they all have a memorable parade or processional.

We celebrate the story of Jesus' birth with the Sunday School children processing in... as shepherds, and wise men, and Mary and Joseph. Then on Easter Sunday with organ and trumpet playing we sing "*Jesus Christ is Risen today.*" And at Nazareth Lutheran they even had the choir process down the center aisle carrying Easter lilies.

These processional Sundays are dramatic. They not only draw our attention with the movement...but they are also memorable. We can picture in our minds the children in their costumes at Christmas and we can picture the palm branches waving and the lilies.

There's the common expression... "everyone loves a parade" and I think there's truth to that. We are drawn to the spectacle of watching a dramatic procession. But Palm Sunday, is about more than just a parade.

You notice on your bulletin...today is actually referred to as both Palm Sunday and the Sunday of the Passion. And to connect Palm Sunday with the Passion or suffering of Christ, tells us something about where this week will end.

This morning before the service I mentioned that today is actually referred to as both Palm Sunday and the Sunday of the Passion. And to connect Palm Sunday with the passion or suffering of Christ, tells us something about where this week will end.

There really is a shift in this service from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem to the events later in the week. Notice as this service progresses, especially in the hymn after the sermon, and the closing hymn, that we sing about the journey Jesus takes to the cross.

Jesus journey to the cross, though, is different kind of procession.

On Sunday, all of Jesus' disciples were with him. But we know from the Gospels, that as Jesus got closer to the cross, fewer and fewer of his disciples remained. Peter, James, and John, fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Then Judas betrayed him. Jesus was arrested, and more disciples began to fall away and only followed him at a distance. Peter stayed out in the courtyard and tried to blend in with the crowd until they spotted him, and he denied Jesus three times. Ultimately, at the cross only one of the 12 remained ...and that was John.

Just as Jesus' disciples had a hard time following Him we also have a hard time taking the journey with Him to cross. We love to come to the celebrations and the festivals of the church. We love to celebrate Christmas, and Palm Sunday, and Easter but have a harder time taking that journey with Jesus to the cross.

In a wonderful book entitled, *Kneeling in Jerusalem* there is poem called "Between Parades." And I think the poem says a lot about us.

It begins with the frenzy of celebration as Jesus enters Jerusalem...
 ...with people throwing their coats and palm branches in his path.
 ...people shouting loud enough to make the Pharisees complain.
 But then the poem concludes with these words:

"It's between parades that we don't do so well.
 From Sunday to Sunday we forget our hosannas.¹

I identify with what this poem is talking about.
 I love to worship on Palm Sunday. I love to worship on Easter.
 But it's harder...to take that journey with Jesus all the way to the cross...
 to meditate on Jesus' suffering... for me... because of my sin.

I love to worship on Palm Sunday and Easter
 but I need to worship on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.
 I need to take that journey with Jesus to the cross.

One of my favorite stories is about the ticker tape parade that the city of Minneapolis celebrated after the Minnesota Twins won their first World Series people were jammed along the parade route waiting for the players to come by.

Of course that included fans that were with the team the whole season and the fans that jumped on the bandwagon after the Twins actually won the Series.

And some of those fans who joined the celebration later in the season hadn't followed the team, and didn't know who all the players were. But they knew name Kirby Puckett...and that's who they came to see.

And so in the crowds along the parade route, all of a sudden there would be a buzz and people would say, "Hey Kirby," "Kirby's coming."

¹ Ann Weems *Kneeling in Jerusalem*, (Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1992), p.69.

And one of the convertibles would come by. But even though it wasn't Kirby, the people who didn't know the players, kept yelling "Hey Kirby."

A little later, another convertible rolled by, and the same thing happened. Again it wasn't Kirby...but the crowd kept yelling, "Hey, Kirby."

Well, the point of the story is that there were fans who knew the players, and had cheered them on all season long. They knew the Twins had finished in last place, just the year before. And one year later, they had gone all the way to win the World Series. These fans knew the whole story.

Then there were the fans who didn't know the whole story and could hardly recognize the star player. Those fans had really missed out on a great story.

It's also kind of like picking up a mystery novel and deciding you're going to just read the last page...and try to make sense of the story.

You might find out on the last page that, "the butler did it."

You might even find out on the last page "how the butler did it."

But more than likely, you are not going to know "why the butler did it."

You'll know a few facts about the story, but you won't know the story.

The same thing is true of the Gospels.

The Gospels tell the story of Jesus' birth, his life, His suffering on the cross, and His resurrection.

They tell the story of God's great love for us...the love shown for us in His Son Jesus. But if we just read the last page or if we just worship on Easter we won't understand the depth of that love.

There are two places in the Gospels where we hear about Jesus weeping. We know the first one of course, is when his dear friend Lazarus died. And the second one, is in this story of Holy Week.

Luke tells us that as Jesus was approaching the city of Jerusalem, he saw the city and he wept over it. Many people told Jesus not to go there that if he traveled to Jerusalem, he would surely be put to death.

But he persisted. He went to Jerusalem and He wept when He saw the city... He wept because of His love for the people.

How could he possibly love those who would later yell, "Crucify Him."
Perhaps a story will help:

Her name was April and she lived in a series of one foster home after another. She was moved so much and had to cope with so many temporary locations...that as a coping mechanism, she withdrew into herself...into her own little fantasy world.

Finally, she was placed in a foster home and was in the care of a couple along with fourteen other children.

They were keeping the children because they were paid to do so. They were hard and sometimes cruel in dealing with the kids.

April found joy in her world of fantasy where she hummed little tunes and sang songs that she made up. She also pretended to write the songs down and would put them in an envelope.

Her foster mother was bothered about her writing these notes and wondered what she was doing with them. Her worst fear was that April was writing a letter to the foster care authorities...a letter that might trigger an investigation and possibly cause them to lose their primary source of revenue.

So, April was forbidden to write her little songs or even to sing them. Then one day several weeks later, the foster mother noticed April humming her songs and writing them down again. She noticed that April was scribbling a note again. She watched as April folded the note and put it into an envelope and walked out into the yard, not toward the mailbox, but toward a tree.

She climbed the tree and there in the fork of two limbs, she placed the envelope. Her foster mother immediately summoned her husband, he secured a ladder, and they got the note out of the fork of the tree.

He handed it to his wife and she read these words:
"Whoever finds this - I love you."

That is why Jesus came to Jerusalem.
"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him.

May the story of this Holy Week...
the story of Jesus' tears of love...his tears of blood
...lead us to the cross, and from the cross, to the joy of Easter. Amen.