

The Triumphal Entry of Jesus

Palm Sunday

Thesis: Let us welcome Jesus into our communities and our cities, and let us share the good news of Jesus Christ.

“Hated or praised, Christ was then what He will be again: the sole focus of attention of whole cities in days of great spiritual awakening. Our best prayers are prayers of welcome — that the risen Jesus Himself will be recognized and received throughout entire communities. Whenever there has been revival, it has been a partial fulfillment of the promise of Palm Sunday. Now, more than ever, it’s time to invite Christ the Lord to bring His life-giving presence upon our cities” (*Seek God for the City 2020*, [Waymakers](#)).

Text: John 12:9 – 37

A lot happens this week in the life of Jesus.

The story is intense, with ebbs and flows, and then it crescendos to the point of the cross, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Led by the Holy Spirit, John focuses almost half of the Gospel of John on a period of less than 24 hours from Thursday night to Friday evening (Chapters 13 – 19).

This week, I want to encourage you to read the Scriptures from the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem to the resurrection of Jesus. Next Sunday, we focus together on the Resurrection of Jesus from John’s Gospel.

In the Scripture readings this week, you will read about the Passover Meal which the Lord Jesus shared with his disciples. Jesus reinterprets it and gives us the Lord’s Supper. **We encounter Jesus at his Communion Table to remember all that he has done for us, all that he is doing, and all that he will do.** If we were getting together this morning, we would share the Lord’s Supper together.

By celebrating the Lord’s Supper, (1) we remember the Lord Jesus and his sacrifice, (2) we proclaim his gospel, and (2) we prophesy his return (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

On Thursday evening of Passion Week, I invite you do something special. Spend time with the Lord as an individual or as a family around the Lord’s table.

First, I invite you to go your own pantry and get some bread and juice. You can use whatever you have. It doesn’t need to be a certain type of bread or cracker in order to be holy. It is all about God’s love shown through the cross of Jesus that makes it sacred.

Next, pray and ask the Lord to help you meet him at his table. Pray and sanctify the bread and the juice and your time with the Lord and each other.

Read one or more of the Scripture passages detailing the meal Jesus shared with his disciples (Matthew 26:14-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:1-39; John 13:1-38).

As an addendum to my sermon notes, I have included a commentary from NT Wright on the Lord's Supper. Read that selection prayerfully. (See the addendum to my sermon notes.)

Now, may I suggest reading 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Worship the Lord Jesus. Declare your love for him. As needed, take time to confess any sins, anything which the Holy Spirit brings to your attention. Then, turn back to the Lord, receiving his forgiveness.

Take the bread or cracker and give thanks for his body broken for you and your salvation and healing. Partake of the bread.

Next, take the cup. Give thanks for his shed blood that cleanses us of all sin and establishes a new covenant. Declare that the blood of Jesus takes away the sin of the whole world. Partake of the juice.

Close in prayer.

By engaging in these spiritual practices of reading the Scripture, praying, and celebrating the Lord's Supper, we are redeeming this period of stay home and work safe. We are taking the time to slow down, to focus on the Lord Jesus, and to spend time with our God.

The Triumphal Entry of Jesus: Palm Sunday

Now, I want to shift gears and focus on the **Triumphal Entry of Jesus**. This Sunday on the church calendar has become known as **Palm Sunday**. Let's talk about what it means.

Read John 12:9-37.

Here's the story.

What does it all mean?

- Jesus said that he was born for such a time as this (John 12:27).
- Jesus knew that his time was short (John 12:23-33).
- Jesus knew that what the people expected of Messiah and what was he was all about were clearly two different things (John 12:34).
- Jesus knew the sacrifice and cost which he was making, hence the Garden of Gethsemane.
- Jesus knew the cost of rejecting him and his kingdom, both then and now (John 12:25). They did not recognize their day of visitation nor did they recognize

what would have brought them peace (Luke 19:41-44). (Because they rejected Jesus and his invitation to live a different way, in 70 AD, their ways resulted in Jerusalem being destroyed and the Jews being scattered in diaspora among the nations for almost two thousand years.)

- Jesus invites you and me to lay down our lives and to follow him in a personal, dynamic relationship (John 12:23-26).
- Jesus knew that as he is lifted up, he would make a way for all people to have relationship with the Living God (John 12:27-36).

Seeking His VISITATION: Welcoming Christ our King

From: *Seek God for the City 2020* (Waymakers.org)

The importance of Palm Sunday

The event we have come to call “Palm Sunday” shines as a prophetic portrait of the spiritual awakening Christ desires to bring. Jesus not only initiated the procession, but He refused to shut it down. He was doing more than merely fulfilling prophecy. He was prophesying, presenting a lasting vision of how He will be recognized in the midst of hostility at the end of the age. Christ will be followed by some in every people. He will be welcomed, at least by a few, in every place. Palm Sunday gives us a vision of the global spiritual awakening we are praying toward.

Preparing the way by prayer

Jesus prepared the way for Palm Sunday by sending His followers to pray on-site in many communities (Luke 10:1-2). The prayers of these ordinary followers were publicly prayed and then openly answered. God was being honored. Jesus was becoming famous in places where He had not yet personally visited. The expectancy of what God would do was great.

A crescendo of welcoming praise

The raising of Lazarus touched off an explosion of welcoming praise (John 12:18). The dramatic answer to Jesus’ prayer for His friend Lazarus (John 11:41-43) got everyone talking about all they had seen God do in the lives of their friends and neighbors. Luke says the crowd was praising God “for all the miracles which they had seen” (Luke 19:37). Grateful praise for many answered prayers quickly became a crescendo of welcoming worship.

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Palm Sunday: the hope of Christ's visitation

A lasting movement

Thousands of people gathered at the temple with Jesus early every morning, hanging on His every word (Luke 21:38). The Palm Sunday worshipers should not be confused with the much smaller mob which shouted for Jesus' execution later in the week. That crowd was incited by Christ's enemies, who were forced to arrest Jesus by night "because they were afraid of the people" — the very throng that had welcomed and honored Him daily with increasing devotion (Luke 22:2, Mark 14:1-2).

A prophetic portrait

Palm Sunday is sometimes dismissed as if it were a political rally gone wrong. But Jesus was all for it. He planned whatever could have been planned. And He refused to silence the celebration. He said that rocks would have cried out if the people had been restrained (Luke 19:40). The intensity mounted. The crowds increased. Eventually "all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this?'" (Matthew 21:10). Those who hadn't yet personally encountered Jesus were eager to know more. If Jesus was giving us any indication of how God desires to visit communities with transforming power, we are right in praying for such receptive glory to sweep throughout whole cities.

The hope of visitation: His arrival more than our revival

Hated or praised, Christ was then what He will be again: the sole focus of attention of whole cities in days of great spiritual awakening. Our best prayers are prayers of welcome — that the risen Jesus Himself will be recognized and received throughout entire communities. Whenever there has been revival, it has been a partial fulfillment of the promise of Palm Sunday. Now, more than ever, it's time to invite Christ the Lord to bring His life-giving presence upon our cities.

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Seeking the VISITATION of CHRIST the KING

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. — Psalm 118:26

On Palm Sunday, Jesus was rejected by a few, which caused Him to weep. But He was also welcomed by many.

Day after day people thronged to Him and His teaching, celebrating the wonders of the coming kingdom. Palm Sunday may be the clearest picture we have of how God visits an entire community with His transforming power. Today we celebrate the hope that God will visit His people throughout the world to glorify Himself before the end of the age.

*The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains,
the world, and those who dwell in it...*

*Lift up your heads, O gates,
and be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in!*

Who is the King of glory?

*The LORD strong and mighty,
the LORD mighty in battle!*

*Lift up your heads, O gates,
and lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in!*

Who is this King of glory?

The LORD of hosts. He is the King of glory! (Psalm 24:1, 7-10).

Application:

1. Let us welcome Jesus into our hearts and lives.
2. Let us live as agents of the kingdom of God, sharing the love of God and the way of Jesus with others.
3. Let us welcome Jesus into our communities and our cities.
4. "Now, more than ever, it's time to invite Christ the Lord to bring His life-giving presence upon our cities" (*Seek God for the City 2020*, [Waymakers](#)).

Addendum: The Lord's Supper

NT Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapter 16-28* (Matthew 26:26-35)

The cockcrow, and Peter's denial, are all the more poignant because of what has just happened. Though the disciples probably didn't understand it much at the time—it was all too bewildering and unexpected—the meal they shared with Jesus has echoed down the centuries like that insistent cockcrow, reminding us not just of our own failings (though it may do that as well) but of Jesus' coming to meet us, failing as we were, and inviting us to a banquet in which his own self was the food and drink. This is such a strange, and even repellent, idea, that we have to take a couple of steps back from it and approach it with care.

As far as the disciples were concerned, this was a Passover meal. That's what they had prepared. To this day, when Jewish families all over the world celebrate Passover, there is special food and drink, prescribed by custom going back thousands of years. And there are particular words to say.

The words tell the story of how God's people, Israel, came out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, leaving behind their slavery and going on to freedom in their promised land. The food and drink are carefully chosen to symbolize and express aspects of that great event, the Exodus. Thus, for instance, there are bitter herbs, which symbolize the hardships the Israelites suffered in Egypt. The head of the household must say the words, introducing the different parts of the meal.

All this, which is so strange to many in the modern world, would have been second nature to the disciples. They would of course have been expecting Jesus to take the part of the leader in this regular, annual celebration of God's promised freedom.

And so he did. But, in doing so, he drew the meaning of the whole meal on to himself. He offered a new direction of thought which, for those who followed him and came to believe in him, took Passover in quite a new direction, which has likewise continued to this day. We can perhaps imagine the shock of the disciples as they realized he was departing from the normal script and talking about... himself.

'My body, my very self... here it is!'

'My blood, my life, my death, all for you, all so that sins can be forgiven... here it is!'

Look around the room in your mind's eye and see the reaction. Peter, furious that Jesus is still talking about dying, and on such a special evening as well. Thomas, giving a little shake of the head. He'd not understood more than a third of what had gone before, and

he doesn't understand this at all. John (if indeed it is John, reclining close to Jesus) looking up in astonishment, in a mixture of love and fear. Judas (Matthew implies that he's still here at this point) frozen in his place, wondering how much Jesus knows and how much he's guessed.

And you? What is your reaction to this extraordinary performance?

For many Christians, the regular celebration in which we copy Jesus, remembering that Last Supper and repeating its action in order to go back in heart and mind to the original setting, and nourish ourselves once more with the death and life and presence and personality of Jesus—for many of us, this is a central part of our story. We couldn't do without it. But for other Christians, it has remained a puzzle, a bit threatening, perhaps. It's been so overlaid with different meanings, and seems to have caused so many squabbles, that people are almost shy about it.

The heart of the matter is reasonably straightforward, though none the less breathtaking. Jesus was drawing into one event a millennium and more of Jewish celebrations. The Jews had believed for some while that the original Exodus pointed on to a new one, in which God would do at last what he had long promised: he would forgive the sins of Israel and the world, once and for all. Sin, a far greater slave-master than Egypt had ever been, would be defeated in the way God defeated not only Egypt but also the Red Sea. And now Jesus, sitting there at a secret meal in Jerusalem, was saying, by what he was doing as much as by the words he was speaking: this is the moment. This is the time. And it's all because of what's going to happen to me.

Jesus' action at the Last Supper was, you see, the equivalent in symbolic language (and symbols are the most powerful form of communication) of those sayings about the son of man being handed over, and giving his life as a ransom for many (20:28). Somehow, identifying the bread and the wine with his body (about to be broken in death) and his blood (about to be spilt on the cross), and inviting his followers to share it and find in it the gift of forgiveness of sins, of new life, of God's kingdom—somehow this action had then, and still has today, a power beyond words. A power to touch and heal parts of our broken and messy lives. A power to tell the world around that Jesus is Lord (see 1 Corinthians 11:26).

But, perhaps because that power always remains mysterious, and never in our own control, many people found then and find still that it's all too much. The disciples, instead of being heartened and encouraged, were all about to be scattered, as Jesus went alone to face the darkest night of the world. Peter, big, strong, blustering Peter, was about to be reduced to a spluttering, lying, weeping fool. Perhaps that tells us something, too, about the power of Jesus' action. Perhaps when it starts to have its effect the first sign is that we learn just how weak and needy we are. Perhaps the

combination of Last Supper and cockcrow will always haunt us, always challenge us, always lay bare our continuing need for God's redeeming love, until the new day dawns and Jesus shares with us the new wine of the kingdom of God (NT Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapter 16-28*).