

P.A.L.M. Sunday

John 12:12-19

March 28, 2021

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For Christians all around the world, the next seven days are the holiest days of the year. At least for Christians who follow the Western calendar at that's because the next seven days were the last seven days where Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem and eventually was nailed to a cross, paying the price for the sins of the world.

These next seven days are also known as the Holy Week and in many churches and denominations, various observances are held on different days of the week. Here at St. Mark's before the pandemic hit, we would have a very lively and a very festive procession during the Palm Sunday worship, along with services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday too. Unfortunately, with the challenges of holding in-person services, we're only having one service and that will be on Good Friday - via zoom at 7 pm.

So today begins a special week known as the Holy Week, and on this Palm Sunday morning - our scripture passage comes from John 12:12-19 also known as the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.

The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Blessed is the King of Israel!"

Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.

Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him.

So the Pharisees said to one another, "Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

In just about every single Christian Church that follows the western calendar, that is the scripture passage that will be read during the worship service. Some will read from John's version (like the passage above), while others may choose to read from one of the other gospels.

Also, in many of those churches (and I'm taking take a guess here) there's probably a joke that every single preacher will be starting their sermon with and that's because when it comes to Palm Sunday humor, there aren't many to choose from!

(here's the joke!)

A funny story is told about a little boy who was sick on Palm Sunday and had to stay home from church with his mom while his dad went all by himself. When the father returned home, he went to check-in on his son and when he entered his room, he had a palm branch in his hand.

"Dad, why do you have a palm branch in your hand?" asked the little boy. The father replied: *"Well, today was the day that Jesus came into town and everyone waved palm branches in their hands and also laid them on the road in his honor. So we all got palm branches today."*

The little boy looked disappointed and said: *"Awww shucks! The one day I miss church and Jesus finally shows up!"*

In case you're saying to yourself, "I've read that joke before," that's because I told the joke last year! And if you can't remember, well that's ok, but for those of you who don't want to hear that joke next year, please send me some new Palm Sunday jokes (and save my pastoral career!)

The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.

What a vivid story! Jesus came to town riding on the back of a donkey with pomp and circumstance, with fanfare and celebration, with people waving palm branches and placing their cloaks on the ground and shouting: *"Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the Highest!"*

If you were one of the lucky ones who actually found lodging in Jerusalem when our story took place, and if you were among those who were able to find a spot along the entrance gates when Jesus rode by, this would have been a moment to remember,

because the long awaited Messiah, the long anticipated Savior of Israel was coming to town to take His place as the people's choice to usher in a new era!

But if you happened to be in town that day, and for some reason you missed that event, you would have been like that little boy sick at home saying: *"Aww shucks! The one day I miss church and Jesus finally shows up!"*

Today I've prepared a short message to help us all remember what this day was about, and to make it a little fun and to help us remember the sermon, I'm taking each letter from the word "PALM" to say something about our story.

P stands for PROCESSION.

The first letter in the word "PALM" is the letter "P" and what the letter "P" stands for in our story is that Palm Sunday was a **Procession**.

Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem was a grand procession! It was a procession on a scale that had no rival! It was a procession on a magnitude that was off the charts!

This wasn't a little "welcome home" ceremony for the local hometown hero, this was the event of all events, this was the parade of all parades! It was high energy. it was a moment to remember! There was excitement in the air! There were goosebumps on your arms! Even the ground beneath everyone's feet was shaking and rumbling too!

Listen to how the gospel of Matthew described the atmosphere:

"When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" (Matt. 21:10) That's the NIV translation. you're going to like the *MSG version*.

As [Jesus] made his entrance into Jerusalem the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking: "What's going on here? Who is this?" The parade crowd answered: This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee."

The whole entire city of Jerusalem was "shaken" and "stirred!" People were running around telling everyone that Jesus was on His way! And it got to the point that the Pharisees said: *"Look, the whole world has gone after him!"*

Palm Sunday was a Procession! Jesus was coming to town and to prepare for His arrival, John's gospel said that the people took palm branches and went out to meet him.

That tells me that the people were also prepared, which also starts with the letter “P.”

What kind of preparations are you making for the holiest week of the year?

What kind of preparations are you making for the most important event?

One year back when I was in college, my spring break happen to coincide with Holy Week. I didn’t go away for spring break unlike how some college kids do, but every single night, I went out to meet up with friends.

Well, on Friday night, there was going to be a big party that I was going to attend, and right after dinner I was ready to head out. At that same time, my parents were also going out and as we were about to say “good bye” and head out for the night, my mom says to me, “Where are you going?” I said: “A party.” It was a party that I was looking forward to going to all week long.

Then I asked them: “Where are you guys going.” And my mom said: *“We’re going to church. Today is Good Friday. The night Jesus died for our sins.”* And so, this future pastor went back upstairs and changed into something more appropriate and came back downstairs to go to church with his parents. It’s safe to say, I was completely unprepared for the most important week, especially for good Friday.

I heard that in some traditions some Christians will go through their homes, and if there is a cross on the wall - they’ll take it down and clean it, or if there are religious paintings or icons - they’ll dust them off. I read this article this past week were a young child would clean his leather Bible as a way of honoring and venerating God’s word.

The people of Jerusalem prepared for Jesus’ arrival by cutting down palm branches, getting ready for a grand procession. What are things you can do, even if you have to stay at home to prepare for Jesus’ arrival?

“A” stands for “Animal”.

The second letter in the word “PALM” is the letter “A” and what the letter “A” stands for in our story has to do with an **Animal**.

The letter “A” stands for “animal” and in particular – a Donkey which is what Jesus rode as He made His grand entrance.

John told it this way.

“Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it as it is written: “Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion, see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”

Of all the animals that Jesus could have rode into town - Jesus chose a donkey. Not an elephant or a lion which would have made a statement, not a horse, not a camel, but of all the animals to choose from for His grand and final entrance, Jesus chose to ride a lowly and humble donkey.

Here in Southern California, people are very dependent on cars for transportation. Unlike other parts of the country where more people use public transportation, here in So. Cal, it’s still more convenient to drive your own car. And so the cars we buy and the cars we drive, sometimes say things about us.

For example, here’s a picture of Arnold Schwarzenegger driving a Hummer.



That’s one way to make a powerful statement!



Here's a picture of Victoria Beckham standing in front of a limited edition Range Rover.



Here's Jay Leno with one of his many cars. I don't even know, what kind of car that is - it's some kind of roadster, but could you imagine seeing any of those cars pulling right up to St. Mark's?!

The kind of cars we drive sometimes say things about ourselves. They can say we're all about muscle and power, or they can say we're "one of a kind" and really unique. They can say we're "exotic" and want to turn heads.

Well, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, He also wanted to make a statement, and the statement He wanted to make wasn't about muscle or power or being unique of one of a kind, but to let everyone know that Jesus came to establish peace, not to declare war, but to say "the war was already over."

Because, according to the O.T. book Zech. 9:9, when kings went off to war - they rode horses into battle, but when kings returned from battle - having conquered their enemies, the animal they rode as they headed back into town was a donkey.

Well, I don't think that the people got the subtle message, but Jesus came to establish peace and not to wage war.

"L" stands for Loud Voices!

The third letter in the word "PALM" is the letter "L" and what the letter "L" stands for in our story are "**Loud Voices**," as the people shouted: "Hosanna! Hosanna!"

There was a multitude of loud voices as Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem.

They were shouting: "*Hosanna!*"

They were screaming: "*Hosanna! Hosanna!*"

In the footnotes of my Bible, it explains what that word means. It says the word "Hosanna" in Hebrew means: "Save!" and it was also an exclamation of praise.

Well, the English word "save" makes it sound like a "request" sort of like: "Save us!" but I think a better way to understand what the people meant would have been something like: "Jesus Saves!"

That would be more fitting for a grand procession. That would be more appropriate to say as Jesus rode by, "*Jesus SAVES!*" or "*Jesus will SAVE US!*" It was an exclamation of Praise and an expression of spiritual confidence.

"You Got this Jesus!! "You can do it!"

In the Korean language, when we want to express our support or encouragement to someone who is about to do something challenging, we say the word: "Pah-ee-ting!" (파이팅 for those who read Korean.) It's is a "Konglish" word - part Korean, part English, and it sounds a whole lot like the English word: "Fighting!"

We say the word when we want to show our support!

We say the word when we want to encourage them!

For example, when someone is about to go up to bat to put our team in the lead: we say: "*Fighting!*" Or when someone is about to run a marathon! we say: "*Fighting!*" Or when a preacher is about to preach a sermon – we say: "*Fighting!*" Actually, we don't say it for that last one, we say something like: "God bless you!"

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, it was more than just a Hebrew word that the people were shouting, Jesus was entering His final week and heading towards the greatest challenge He would ever face!

The greatest temptation - the battle against sin and death, and as Jesus entered the city - the people couldn't remain silent, but with loud voices, they shouted to Jesus: *"Hosanna! Hosanna!"*

I can't remember when it was exactly but sometime last year during the height of the pandemic, people in other parts of the country started to walk out onto their balconies, and at a certain time in the evening - they started to make a whole lot of noise to show their support and appreciation to all the front line workers as they were getting off work.



In parts of Europe, (Italy, France and Spain) they came out to their balconies and started to clap and cheer - some even started to sing,

In parts of Asia, cars would pull over and they would start clapping,



And even here in the United States - the movement caught on too. These are pictures of New Yorkers showing their appreciation to all the front line workers as they are passing by.



One person wrote this post online: *“From your windows, doors and rooftops, for the doctors, nurses, carers, emergency services, delivery workers, warehouse workers, cleaners, supermarket staff and everyone else keeping [us] safe at this time”*

and then to pause at 8 pm on a certain day of the week to make as much noise as possible!

Jesus was on his way into Jerusalem not because He was a front-line worker, He went to Jerusalem, not to look for a cure or a vaccine, Jesus went to Jerusalem because only He alone was able to save a dying world from the consequences of sin.

And so the people came out of the homes and off of their balconies to meet Jesus at the city gates, and with palm branches in their hands with the loud voices, they shouted “Hosanna!”

The “**P**” in Palm stands for PROCESSION.

The “**A**” in Palm stands for ANIMAL.

The “**L**” in Palm stands for LOUD VOICES.

That leaves just one more letter the letter “**M**.”

M stands for be Mindful

The letter “M” in the word “PALM” stands for “Mindfulness.”

During this Holy Week be “Mindful.”

In John 12:16, the passage said:

“At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.”

Which means, when the original triumphal entry took place, the disciples didn’t know what was going on. And probably not just the disciples, but just about everyone.

No one knew that this would be Jesus’ final week. No one knew that Jesus would be arrested and then falsely accused and then nailed to a cross. And Peter - he didn’t know that he would deny knowing Jesus.

When the disciples saw Jesus enter Jerusalem they all thought that Jesus was going there to observe an Old Testament ritual. What they didn’t know was that He was actually going there to broker a new covenant.

The people all thought that Jesus came to Jerusalem to start a revolution. What they didn't know, was that He actually came to restore a broken relationship.

The people thought that Jesus had come to the city to take his rightful place as the new king of Israel, what they didn't know was that He didn't come to be exalted and placed high upon a pedestal - but to be nailed to the cross like a common criminal.

Nobody knew then what we know now, that the road to salvation had to go through the cross, one that would cost Jesus everything.

And so, be "mindful" of the events that took place this week and of the events that would unfold.