

## **“Courage and Purpose”**

Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020

Matthew 21:1-11

Covenant Presbyterian Church

Madison, WI

Rev. Charlie Berthoud

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

“Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

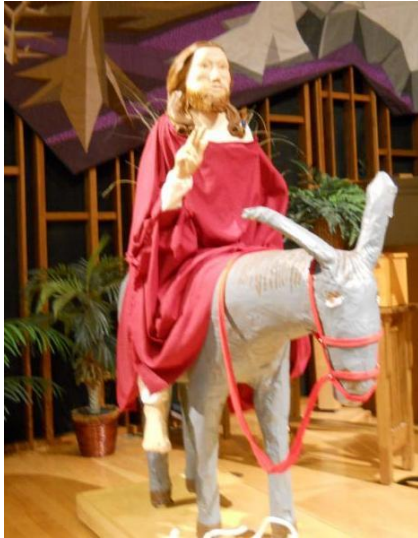
When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”



Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Happy Palm Sunday!

This is a festive and even fun day in the church year.



We imagine Jesus riding on a donkey, in sort of a parade.

In worship, we sing joyful songs, the choir and/or the children process in, and we wave our palm branches. Some of us—not me—can take a palm frond and fold it into a cross.

Some of us take our palm branches and tickle and poke our siblings or the people around us. I might have done that once or twice....

But Palm Sunday isn't just a fun celebration.

If we dig a little deeper into our faith, we realize Jesus is going into Jerusalem, riding on a lowly donkey, yet acclaimed as a king. His presence as a king is a direct threat to King Herod.

Jesus the king was taking a stand for the kingdom of God, against the political and religious kingdom of his time.

And we need to remember that the word “Hosanna” has come to be understood as a word of praise, but originally it meant “Save us, we pray.” The people were afraid and wanted to be saved.

So our Palm Sundays may be festive on the surface but 2000 years ago, when Jesus went to Jerusalem it was a scary time and it was dangerous for him.

Here at Covenant, we've been reading the gospel according to Matthew in Lent. There are two key moments in the gospel where Jesus enters a new stage. Each key moment begins with the same wording. After his birth and baptism, he begins his ministry in chapter four. Matthew 4.17 reads:

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Then we read that Jesus called the first disciples, two brothers, saying: “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

So with courage and purpose, people begin to join Jesus in his ministry of proclaiming the good news--teaching and healing and feeding hungry people and calling out the hypocrisy of the leaders. As Jesus leads them into this new kingdom, the tension mounts, as opposition to Jesus grows. Matthew 16.21 reads:

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

From that time on...Jesus continues proclaiming God’s love for the world, as he denounced hypocrisy, greed, and corruption.

Just a few chapters later, Jesus enters Jerusalem, with courage and purpose, to do what he was called to do.

Through his life, he proclaims a new way, God’s way, even though he knew it would mean suffering and death on a cross.

In this time of coronavirus, I am grateful for the courage and purpose of Jesus.

And I’m grateful for the courage and purpose of so many people in our world today, in this time of coronavirus.

We see doctors, nurses, aides, janitors, researchers, technicians, office staff, and all those who support health care—risking their well-being for the sake of others.

We see police officers, EMTs, firefighters—people who run into literally and figuratively burning buildings to save lives—risking their well-being for the sake of others.

If you’re involved in healthcare or public safety and by chance you are watching this, please know that hundreds, thousands, and millions of people appreciate what you are doing, and many people are praying for you.

And we are also grateful for people working in the food service industry, getting food to the rest of us.

The farmers and pickers, the processors and truck drivers, the cooks and staff, the stockers and baggers and clerks and managers. Everyone.

With two teenage boys at home, I'm especially glad for those who are providing food!

On Monday, I went to Metcalfe's Market near our house, to stock up on groceries. While I was there, I spoke briefly with the store director and a few employees—from a safe distance. I thanked them for being there and I asked how they were feeling.

All of them said in one way or another, with a smile and a sense of determination, that they were glad to be there, glad to do their part.

My cashier was a young woman who had only been working there a few months. From behind the newly-installed plexiglass screen, she smiled and said that she was glad to help out how she could, especially for the sake of older folks. (I wonder if she considered me an "older folk.")

I got a sense that the people working in the supermarket have a newfound sense of courage and purpose.

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I'm hopeful that as we continue this long journey through the time of virus that we can encourage one another to find courage and purpose.

Most of us are not ER doctors or grocery store clerks, but we all can find ways to be brave, helpful, loving, generous, kind, hopeful.

I find myself thinking about people who are working at the polls in Wisconsin on Tuesday—people who believe in our democratic system, people who have hope for the future.

I find myself thinking about a group of teenagers from Memorial High School who are working with the American Red Cross to host a blood drive, scheduled to be here at Covenant in a couple weeks.

And I find myself thinking about wonderful acts of generosity, great stories from all over.



I was touched when I heard about Pete Damos, a restaurant owner in Australia. He had to close his restaurant, and he was at home, hearing about the all the unemployed people were suffering. So he went to the bank and withdrew \$10,000 Australian dollars, in \$100

bills. Then he went to the local unemployment office where there was a very long line, and he simply gave everyone \$100.

<https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/australian-cafe-owner-gives-away-10k-in-cash-to-unemployed-strangers/>

And I think about the people who are at home, cooped up inside, facing loneliness, frustration, and isolation—and we're realizing that we might be living like this for quite a while.

It's hard, and we all have moments or days of struggle.

But with inspiration from examples around us, and with God's help we are doing our best to

- love one another, be patient with one another,
- learn new technology, rediscover old games,
- be generous with time and money, be kind to neighbors,
- and stay rooted and grounded in God's word and God's love.

Today we wave our palm branches, or maybe we just wave our palms, we prayerfully call out Hosanna, save us.

On that first Palm Sunday, 2000 years ago, Jesus entered Jerusalem with courage and purpose, proclaiming God's love for the world. Our call is to follow him.

*Let us pray. Thank God for the life death and resurrection of Jesus. Thank you for his courage and purpose in the face of danger. Renew us we pray with your hope and fill us with your love, this day and always. Amen.*