

PALM SUNDAY - APRIL 5

Describe an event, holiday, or day you remember or commemorate (have a ceremony for) and why it's meaningful for you to acknowledge/celebrate/honor it every year.

Note: If you are with a group, have each person take a turn sharing.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 21:1-11

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."

Reflection

On Palm Sunday, we celebrate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. His teachings have spread, and his following has grown. As he rides into the city, people greet him with cheers and fanfare. There is a sense of joy, relief, and hope among the people. Jesus brings good news for the hurting, sick, impoverished, outcasts, and all who are oppressed by people in power. All along his path, the people wave palm fronds and shout, "Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!" in celebration of his arrival.

This parade is also an act of rebellion. Jesus has already frustrated the people in power. His procession only angers them more. After this day of rejoicing, things change quickly. Jesus' message about God's kingdom uplifting the powerless made people who held lots of power feel threatened. Jesus knows hard things lie ahead during Holy Week, but for his followers, it was a sudden and unsettling shift. In a matter of days, Jesus' world and that of his followers turned completely upside down. He went from being cheered to jeered at by the people, from being supported to betrayed.

Jesus tried to prepare his friends for what was coming while they had one last meal together, and he washed their feet; it was very hard for them to believe it. Jesus was abandoned by his closest friends, perhaps because they were terrified of what would happen to them for their connection to Jesus. Joy, relief, and hope were replaced by fear, loneliness, isolation, worry, and uncertainty about the future.

We know something about the world suddenly changing right now because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are experiencing a significant shift - a shift from joy and community to fear and uncertainty and loneliness. As we go through Holy Week, we remember how Jesus and all who loved him experienced fear, loneliness, pain, and even death. Maybe it feels a little overwhelming to enter into the heaviness of Holy Week when there are already so many hard things happening all around us.

But there is also good news in Holy Week.

It reminds us Jesus has felt what we feel, and he is with us even when we feel scared and alone. In Jesus, we see the promise that no matter how hard things get, even in the face of death itself, there is still the promise of resurrection, of new life. Every year we celebrate Holy Week to remember that in ordinary times and in the most challenging times, God is present with us and at work creating new life.

Things may look different afterward, there can be real loss, grief, and hardship, but we hold onto the promise of resurrection: new life will happen when the hard times have passed. So on this Palm Sunday, wherever we are, we wave our palms defiantly—finding joy and hope in the promise of new life and of Jesus with us.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think it would have been like to be in Jerusalem when Jesus came into the city?
2. What helps you have hope when you face a difficult situation?
3. What stories do you remember when you feel worried, afraid, or uncertainty about the future?
4. What good news do you see right now?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for loving us so much and for coming to live among us in the world. Help us remember your love and the hope you bring as we journey with you during Holy Week. **Amen.**



