

Palm Sunday, Year A
A Sermon Preached by Fr Ian M Delinger
on March 29, 2026

Isaiah 50:4-9a / Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 / Philippians 2:5-11 / Matthew 21:1-11

*May my words be acceptable to God;
faithful to the teachings of Christ;
and inspired by the Holy Spirit;
that we may be blessed by the same Triune God.*

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil.

One could equally read that as:

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in an earthquake.

The word *σειώ* translated *turmoil* is the root of the word *σεισμός* translated *earthquake* in Matthew 24 – during Jesus' time in Jerusalem before His Death.

Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Matt 24.7-8

That should be our clue that Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem was a big thing! That turmoil, that quaking was *not* a geological phenomenon. It was *the people*! What we now celebrate as Palm Sunday was the people's party: it was a celebration that spontaneously sprang up as the people realized that Jesus was entering Jerusalem. Jesus didn't plan this Himself. His Disciples didn't drum up the people like a warm-up act at a rock concert. *The People* – normal followers of Jesus like you and me – were so excited that they caused a bit of an earthquake with their exuberance for the Messiah!

*Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!*

Hosanna: Save us! They knew that this man was the Messiah.

I have always been uncomfortable with Palm Sunday as the Church prescribes its celebration. I have never liked how the joy of the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem gives way to an extended reading of the Passion, often by various voices among the congregation. The Passion is what we do on Good Friday. I want this moment of joy and celebration around the recognition and realization of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah – the *final epiphany* that this man whom I follow is also God. But that all gets pushed aside as soon as we get into the building and the music stops. I've never been comfortable with that. I've been so uncomfortable that, when I lived in San José, I would drag my roommate – the daughter of the priest of a neighboring parish to mine – to the Napa Valley for a weekend of wine tasting.

So...I changed what we did today. I am saving the Passion for Good Friday so we could explore and experience this *final epiphany* and this momentous turning point in Jesus' ministry that gets barely a mention in our Sunday worship. We as the post-Passion, post-Resurrection followers of Jesus already know and claim Him as the Messiah and know on this Palm Sunday what is to come during this special liturgical time we have set aside as Holy Week. Yet for the rest of the year, it's implied that we experience the scriptures as they come to us, and that we put aside our knowledge of history in order to engage with the texts of the day. So, let's do that today with Palm Sunday.

Does anyone remember the opening scene of The Beatles' movie "It's Been A Hard Day's Night"? Or for the younger folks, the opening scene of "Austin Powers", which is based on The Beatles' film? When The Beatles or Austin Powers are sighted in London, their fans chase them through the streets. The celebrities are not looking for fandom. It's the fans to spontaneously create the pandemonium around The Beatles and Austin Powers.

This moment, this text of Matthew 21 is that celebrity moment for Jesus. He has not put Himself at the center of the scene; the scene has put Him at the center. It's not Jesus' teachings that we hear, not a parable, not a new perspective on the Law, not a healing, not a call to repentance, not a call to follow Him. Rather, it is the crowd's shouts that draw our attention. I like how Veronice Miles, Baptist Minister and seminary professor describes this moment:

This moment is different. Jesus' voice gives way to that of the community, an unremarkable company of friends and strangers who announce with unambiguous resolve that Jesus is the one for whom they have been waiting.¹

It was this crowd that caused the earth to shake throughout all Jerusalem – it wasn't Jesus! It was *about* Jesus, but it wasn't the Son of God who caused the earth to shake. It was Jesus' *celebrity* that caused the earth to shake! This was the result of the *final epiphany* of the crowd that Jesus of Nazareth was the one for whom they had been waiting.

So, if we are going to put ourselves into this story, we need to put ourselves into that place of *epiphany*. This epiphany is markedly different than the miracles of Jesus that we hear during the Season of Epiphany. If we were witnesses to those miracles, they may have caused us to become curious, to want to know more, to want to be around Jesus more. Sure, witnessing the healing of the Man Born Blind, the cleansing of lepers and hearing the testimony of the Woman at the Well might have had us come to the conclusion that this man might well be the Messiah. The Raising of Lazarus – which was Jesus' last miracle just before we met Him as He entered Jerusalem – may have been the deciding moment. But *this moment*, when we see Jesus coming to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, this is when we *get it*. It clicks. And one-by-one, we see Him, not only coming along the road on a donkey, but we see Him for who He is as the Messiah. And like an

¹ *Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2*. “Sixth Sunday in Lent (Liturgy of the Palms)”, Pastoral Perspective, p154.

elaborate tapestry of dominoes, we turn and follow Him, praising Him and singing:

Hosanna to the Son of David!

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

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Hosanna! Save us!

Palm Sunday is *our chance* – not just the people in the Bible story’s chance – *our chance* to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, without being prompted. It’s our opportunity to proclaim our faith out loud, with no fear of retribution, no concern about what others think. The authorities – both religious and civic – are watching, and we don’t care.

Jesus’ Triumphal Entry is not of His own making, it is of ours, the crowd’s. It’s complicated because this moment not only has theological implications, but political and social implications. Theologically, we have realized that the Messiah who is here to save us *is here!* For the vast majority of Jesus’ followers in that time, this was complicated and came with consequences. If Jesus fulfilled the Law, what does that mean in the first place, and what does that mean for my faith practice? Do I need an unblemished animal this weekend? How do I atone for my sins now?

Socially, do we do as Jesus told us and leave our spouses, mothers, brothers, sisters, communities to follow Him and to seek the wisdom of His parables and try to live the Kingdom? That band of 12 who follow Him around have given up everything for the last 3yrs just to follow and listen to Him. Is this now what we are being called to? I quite like fanning the stardom of His celebrity, but I’m not sure about giving over my whole self.

Politically, Rome does not want unrest in Jerusalem. The Jews were a people that they tolerated but also, they were meant to keep them under control. What will Pilate do if the crowds get too unruly?

Do those theological, political and social implications still exist for us today? We don't have the consequences of abandoning our faith. We may lose a few friends if we change churches. If we change religions, it might be a bit more difficult among family and close friends. But it won't mean certain death. But we have a fractured Church, a plethora of Christian communities, with one grouping in particular that is quite vocal, politically influential and potentially violent toward those who don't see their way of being Christian.

Socially, we can have family and friends of different faith beliefs. But we have been taught for decades to not share our faith for fear of a non-existent social ostracization.

Politically, there is a clear separation between our faith and the levers of political power. Or is there? With the rise of White Christian Nationalism, those with the characteristics we associate with following Jesus the Christ – empathy, sharing what we have, non-judgmental, inclusive – those characteristics are increasingly being deemed unpatriotic and even seditious.

But look what the people of Jesus' time accomplished in numbers. The riots that the authorities feared didn't happen. The collapse of Jerusalem didn't happen. But the earth quaked because of the sheer numbers of people who chose at that moment to follow Jesus. All of Jerusalem shook because of the spontaneity of the people to welcome Jesus as "king". And there was a liberation of the people to be followers of Christ.

We are liberated to shout *Hosanna! To the Son of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!* It's the same "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*" as we say and sing in the Sanctus. This is the One. This is He! Whether you say or sing "*Blessed is the One*" or "*Blessed is He*" or "*Blessed are*

You”, you are referring to Jesus in this moment; you are not referring to yourself. When you say or sing “*Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord*” or “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*”, you are referring also to Christ who comes to us in the Sacrament and Christ who will come again. Every celebration of the Eucharist is a re-remembering of the Last Supper and a celebration of the Resurrection. But also, every Sunday is Palm Sunday as we – the People – proclaim the Messiah, proclaim The One, proclaim Him who comes in the name of the Lord – in the breaking of the Bread and in the Age to Come.

This is our liberation to proclaim our Messiah and for a moment live freely without fear or stigma or worry or pain – just joy! So much joy that we cause the earth to quake.

Palm Sunday is not a Sunday that we are *reminded* that Jesus is the Messiah. It’s not a moment that we come to honor the Christ. It’s our moment when we not only proclaim, but we claim Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, and shout *HOSANNA! Lord, Save us!* This was their party; their moment. This is *our* party; *our* moment. We will get to the rest in due time. Let’s just enjoy this spectacular moment and let the earth quake with our proclamation of Jesus as King!