

Worship Service
Palm Sunday – March 28, 2021
St. Christopher-by-the-Sea
Gibson Island, Maryland

Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 154, stanzas 1-2

All Glory, Laud and Honor

Minister: Blessed by God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

People: *And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.*

Minister: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Song of Praise

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

*Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you,
we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.*

*For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.*

Collect for Palm Sunday

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us an example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Isaiah 45:21-25 – see lesson insert

Psalm 118:19-29 – see lesson insert

Second Reading: Philippians 2:5-11– see lesson insert

Hymn 154, stanza 3

All Glory, Laud and Honor

Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11 – see lesson insert

Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Father, we pray for your holy Catholic Church;
That we all may be one.

Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you;
That your Name may be glorified by all people.

We pray for all bishops, priests, and deacons;
That they may be faithful ministers of your Word and Sacraments.

We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world;
That there may be justice and peace on the earth.

Give us grace to do your will in all that we undertake;
That our works may find favor in your sight.

Have compassion on those who suffer from any grief or trouble;
That they may be delivered from their distress.

Give to the departed eternal rest;
Let light perpetual shine upon them.

We praise you for your saints who have entered into joy;
May we also come to share in your heavenly kingdom.

Let us pray for our own needs and those of others.

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Lord, hear the prayers of your people; and what we have asked faithfully, grant that we may obtain effectually, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Confession

Most merciful God,
We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Absolution

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. *Amen.*

Announcements and *America*

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light;
Protect us by thy might, great God, our King.*

Prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication unto thee, and has promised through thy well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

Hymn 154, stanzas 4-5

All Glory, Laud and Honor

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Palm Sunday, March 28, 2021.

Welcome to Holy Week. Arguably the most important week in the life of Jesus and in the lives of those of us who believe that what is important to Jesus is important to us. And, really, not just important, but crucial. Isaiah (**Isaiah 45:25**) describes the occasion this way: “In the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.”

As with any important annual event, we like to revisit it from a variety of angles. Variety is the spice of life, even when it comes to religious faith and practice, including preaching. So let’s look at Holy Week this year as a Theme Park.

Now, stay with me, please. This is not to make light of the seriousness of the occasion. It is simply to highlight what people are feeling, including you and me, as we experience this serious occasion.

As a kid and as a parent, theme parks were not a huge part of my life. I don’t like scary stuff. But, growing up in Southern California, it was hard to avoid Disneyland. And the important ingredient in Disneyland, as is the case for most theme parks, are the rides.

Well, what I would like to do today, as a way of reflecting on Holy Week, is to think of the key events of Holy Week as theme park rides.

Here are the Holy Week services. Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. Our subject today is Palm Sunday.

Here are the key players in the Palm Sunday drama: the authorities, both Roman and Jewish; the crowd; Jesus; and the disciples of Jesus. The applicable theme park ride varies from player to player.

The authorities, both Roman and Jewish, are concerned with maintaining order. They don’t like crowds, unless the crowds feature them. But on this occasion, in this parade, the authorities are not the stars. The star of this parade is a 30 year old carpenter from Nazareth, with a growing number of supporters.

These supporters have been waiting for centuries for the promised Messiah. False messiahs have come and gone. But this candidate is different. There is something about him that rings true, particularly in how people respond to him. He just might be the One for whom they have been waiting. And, if he is, the authorities have a right to be worried.

In his Letter to the Philippians (**Philippians 2:11**) St. Paul notes “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Lord ...” Yes, indeed, this candidate is different. The crowd’s enthusiasm is captured in this morning’s **Psalm (Psalm 118:28)**: “You are my God, and I will thank you; you are my God, and I will exalt you.”

And, when the authorities get nervous, the crowd gets on edge. But, in this case, the enthusiasm of the crowd outweighs the crowd’s caution. The result is that everybody – all the players – are on edge.

Interestingly, one of the calmest players is Jesus. Like most of the Jews, Jesus is aware of the script that the Messiah will follow. Jesus has had three years from the time of his baptism to get used to the idea that he might be the One. And, so he follows the Script. He orders the donkey, because the Script calls for the Messiah to enter Jerusalem on a donkey. From Matthew’s Gospel (**Matthew 21:1**): “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.” No turning back.

Of course, the other players know the script as well. So, when Jesus orders the donkey and rides into the City on the donkey, the Crowd goes wild. They throw down palm branches as a kind of red carpet for this man. He is their man. He is, they feel, the one who will upset the authorities’ apple cart. The entrance is key.

For Jesus, there is a combination of confidence and fear. For the authorities there is anger and some fear as well. For the crowd, there is excitement and anticipation that things are about to change. This craving for action, which the crowd equates with greater freedom, has the potential to deliver just the opposite. Not freedom. Not fulfillment of a promise, but a crackdown by the authorities.

Okay. This is the setting. Which theme park ride fits which player? First, what about the crowd? How much risk is involved for these people who have been waiting for centuries for a Messiah? Well, from the Palm Sunday description, the crowd is going all in. The chance to get close to the donkey and the One riding on the donkey is a huge draw. Yes, there is some risk, but who wants to miss this fulfillment moment? It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "Let's go for it," says the crowd.

Which ride fits this occasion and this player, this crowd? Well, maybe **Space Mountain**. After all, there is anticipation, then build up, then real excitement, and then, following the peak of activity, contentment and gladness. One heck of a ride, but with a very satisfying result.

Second, which ride would the authorities prefer? Maybe **It's A Small World**. Give the crowd something appealing, but not enough to stir them to rebellious action. Focus on safety. Help them identify with comfortable surroundings. Excite them with really interesting things. By all means, don't pick a ride that is going to excite to a frenzy.

Third, what about the disciples. Yes, let's go with **Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance**. The promise of a better life on the other side of courageous action. If Jesus is a rebel, then they, the disciples, are rebels too. Is there danger? Is there risk? You bet. But weigh that risk against being on the Inner Circle of the Messiah. Not even close. Let's do it. Let's help our leader. Let's be the loyal army of followers.

And fourth, where is Jesus? What is he thinking? Is he as confident as the crowd wants him to be? Is he as confident as he needs to be? Once he starts this journey into Jerusalem – a journey that is part of the Messiah script – does he have the stamina to keep going, especially knowing that at some point there is no turning back. A slow ride upwards, with trepidation, and no reverse gear. Yes, the **Matterhorn Bobsleds**. No option of walking down or starting over. Buckle up, Jesus. It's go time!

Well, maybe this theme park ride approach to Palm Sunday is a little hokey. But if it is, it's because you and I aren't on the donkey. It is Jesus who is taking the risk. And we're not those responsible for order, like the authorities. And we're not

those disciples who are committing themselves to follow this man Jesus, perhaps even to death. And we're not the crowd having to pick between the danger of welcoming this Jesus and the safety of putting off for another generation the coming of the Messiah.

We're not there. Or, are we? It's not a matter of going back in time – we can't do that. No, it's a matter of seeing these choices between safety and risk in our generation and responding. Knowing myself reasonably well, I probably would have opted for safety. **Space Mountain** was enough for me, thank you. But maybe not. Maybe I would have summoned more courage. I'll never know about the past. But I can make choices about the future. And helping me make those choices is what Holy Week is all about. It's Holy for a reason.

The best way to honor the tough choices Jesus made is to meet our tough choices head on, and ask not what Jesus would do, though we certainly honor that, but what Jesus would want us to do. He has already done the heavy-lifting. It's our turn now.

Here's to a week of thoughtful preparation and decision-making and thanksgiving for a really interesting life adventure called Holy Week. The hymn we are singing today, **All Glory, Laud, and Honor**, includes this thoughtful phrase: "To thee before thy passion they sang their hymns of praise; to thee, now high exalted, our melody we raise."

Let the ride begin. *Amen.*

Lessons for Palm Sunday – March 28, 2021

First Reading: Isaiah 45:21-25

Declare what is to be, present it – let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say to me, ‘In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.’” All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. But in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm 118:19-29

Open for me the gates of righteousness;

I will enter them; I will offer thanks to the Lord.

“This is the gate of the Lord;

he who is righteous may enter.”

I will give thanks to you, for you answered me

and have become my salvation.

The same stone which the builders rejected

has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord’s doing,

and it is marvelous in our eyes.

On this day the Lord has acted;

we will rejoice and be glad in it.

Hosanna, Lord, hosanna!

Lord, send us now success.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;

we bless you from the house of the Lord.

God is the Lord; he has shined upon us;

form a procession with branches up to the horns of the altar.

“You are my God, and I will thank you;

You are my God, and I will exalt you.”

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

his mercy endures for ever!

Second Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Hymn for Palm Sunday – March 28, 2021

Hymn 154, stanzas 1-2

All Glory, Laud, and Honor

All glory, laud, and honor to thee, Redeemer, King!
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.

Thou art the King of Israel, though David's royal Son,
who in the Lord's Name comest, the King and blessed One.

Refrain

The company of angels is praising thee on high;
and we with all creation in chorus make reply.

Refrain

Hymn 154, stanza 3

All Glory, Laud, and Honor

The people of the Hebrews with palms before thee went;
our praise and prayers and anthems before thee we present.

Refrain

Hymn 154, stanzas 4-5

All Glory, Laud, and Honor

To thee before thy passion they sang their hymns of praise;
to thee, now high exalted, our melody we raise.

Refrain

Thou didst accept their praises; accept the prayers we bring,
who in all good delightest, thou good and gracious King.

Refrain