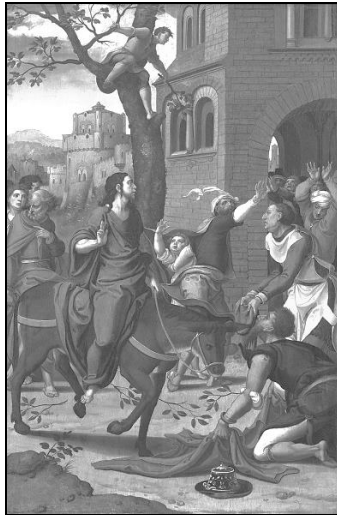


PALM BRANCH PROTEST



Scripture:

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

¹O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

²Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. ²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. ²³This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. ²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD. ²⁷The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

²⁹O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Luke 19:28-40

Listen now to God’s message for you.

²⁸After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴They said, “The Lord needs it.” ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a

loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” ⁴⁰He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



PALM BRANCH PROTEST

How many here have been to a protest march? Santa Rosa has held many marches in the past two years. I have attended three since moving to Santa Rosa: The Women’s March, The Rally Against Gun Violence, and The March for Science.

Generally, I enjoy educating people on a subject rather than marching, but sometimes I do both.

THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

Many years ago, in Iowa City, I worked on the campaign to help ratify The Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA seeks to end the legal preferences and distinctions between men and women in terms of divorce, property, employment, and other legal matters. In the 1970’s a woman made seventy-nine cents compared to every dollar a man made at the same job.

Today, over forty years later, the wage gap has improved by only one point seven cents. According to the Business Insider’s April 2nd, 2019 issue, “On average, the median full-time female worker today makes just eighty point seven cents for every dollar her male counterpart makes.” But I am happy to say the same article has some good news. Of all the states: “California has the smallest pay gap at ten point nine per cent.” Compare that to Louisiana that has a thirty-two per cent gap in pay equity.

The Equal Rights Amendment itself simply says: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”

Thirty-seven states have ratified The Equal Rights Amendment. Only one more state is needed to add it to the constitution. (I’d be glad to do a seminar on this topic if you would like to learn more about why ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment is still important today.)

INJUSTICE

I was too young for the suffragette and civil rights marches, but I am very thankful for those who had the courage to protest and suffer for those causes that benefit me today. And I am thankful that Jesus role-modeled for all of us on how to courageously and peacefully protest oppression and injustice.

Approaching the last week of his life on earth, Jesus decided the injustice around him deserved a loud and meaningful protest. We know it was loud because the Pharisees told him to make the crowd around him quiet down. But Jesus replied that if the crowd was silenced then the stones would shout.

Basically, he is saying most of creation (including the stones and the rocks) praise and adore him which points to Christ’s divinity. Yet the Pharisees seem to miss the meaning of that moment.

CELEBRATING PALM SUNDAY

Generation after generation of Christians have celebrated Palm Sunday by waving palm branches and singing Hosanna! Which means: “God save us!” Remember your first Palm Sunday? Palm Sunday worship is often designed to be like a party. We imagine Jesus riding on a donkey or small horse through the gates of Jerusalem like a festive parade.

Many artists convey the scene that way, but look at the way Dutch artist, Pieter Coecke van Aelst, captures the moment in the painting on page one. You see a few festive actions, but there are also some bowing down to Jesus. One person is trying to see him from a tree like Zacheus. Some

in the crowd look overjoyed, and others look scared. The disciples behind him look confused, and the donkey colt he rides is looking very sad. Jesus is dressed very darkly as if he is going to a funeral. Yet his hand is holding up the sign of blessing.

UNJUST TAXATION

Jerusalem was full of political tension at that time for many reasons. One was taxes. The lowest tax bracket in those days under Roman rule was eighty per cent of what you earned, leaving very little for food and shelter. And the powerful would often come up with new taxes to oppress the people even more severely. If the people couldn't pay their taxes, those in power would take away their property, enslave their family, or throw the person in prison. A video was shown to the congregation illustrating what Jesus was protesting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nY1zkC6BKJQ&list=RDDnSNtS3tOWk&index=3>

By the time of the Palm Sunday protest march (according to Luke and John), Jesus had already protested taking advantage of people by turning over the corrupt money changers' tables at the temple. He had saved the woman caught in adultery, and he had forgiven and healed many. At this point in his ministry, Jesus was teaching that protesting can be another act of holy righteousness.

Jesus was a Protestor

In an article titled *Jesus was a Protestor*, Stephen Mattson explains: "Protesting is the antithesis of being apathetic, complicit, callous, and passive, and Christians should take comfort in the fact that Jesus — the son of God — was very good at it."

"Sometimes Jesus did this quietly, and other times it was provocative, and publicly disruptive. But there's no doubt that Jesus was viewed as a *radical*, who was eventually arrested, beaten, and sacrificed on a cross because of his words and actions....Contrary to our religious assumptions

about righteousness and holiness, sometimes the most Christ-like thing we can do *is* protest."

Jesus included symbolism in his Palm Sunday protest, too. Riding on the donkey colt symbolized a humble peaceful way of entering a town. By including palm branches (which is reported in Matthew's version of this Palm Sunday passage), he was deliberately mocking the Roman Empire and their military victory parades. So, why use a palm branch?

THE PALM BRANCH

According to Wikipedia, the palm branch was a symbol of victory, triumph, peace, and eternal life in Ancient Rome. The palm was sacred in Mesopotamian religions, and in ancient Egypt it represented immortality. A palm branch was awarded to victorious athletes and to soldiers who returned from war as conquerors. Instead of a bouquet of roses handed to the victorious, (as we do today) a palm branch was given to hold during a celebration ceremony. Only a King would have had palm branches laid on the ground for his horse to walk upon.

TWO PARADES ENTERING JERUSALEM

Intentionally, to protest Pilate's effort to show his power, Jesus's triumphal entry into the east side of Jerusalem was timed perfectly to coincide with Pilate's huge military parade arriving from the west.

The sky view of this scene must have been awesome. As Pilate entered the west gate, crowds would have watched him enter on a warhorse, surrounded by his armored soldiers. The ground would have trembled under their feet, their armor creaking as they marched in formation, the sun reflecting off their helmets and spears.

The crowd would have been scared by Pilate's display of power. Cheering and praising Pilate would have been demanded, not spontaneous.

The Roman guard would have reminded the crowd who they serve and ordered them to bow down as a conquered people. Submit or die! Pilate's parade would have represented the power from the whole Roman empire.

From the east, a very different parade. A simple looking man, surrounded by his followers dancing, cheering, feeling joyful, entering on a

small Donkey colt. There were no swords, no spears, no helmets, no intimidation, just a parade of hope for freedom from oppression sponsored by their Messiah.

The differences would have appeared huge! Since old Jerusalem was just over a mile long, the two parades happening at once would have been easily viewed. However, some estimate that at that time, Jerusalem's census was around fifty-thousand people, but during the lead up to Passover it would have swelled to two-hundred-thousand.

A POWERFUL CONTRAST

Reverend Michael Palmer also imagines that "Jesus' procession powerfully stood in contrast to the parade happening on the other side of the city. As Pilate entered the city, his parade was a living embodiment of the Kingdom of Rome and all it stood for: power, greed, and violence. The procession following Jesus embodied an alternative vision, the kingdom of God, loving, serving, equitable, joyful and peaceful. Jesus knew God was on his side as he bravely entered Jerusalem. His Palm Branch Protest was a direct challenge to oppression of the Roman Empire, and it did not go un-noticed. He was making it clear to Pilate, like holding a mirror up to him, exposing the true weakness underneath Pilate's power. Pilate's human kingdom was only temporary. Christ's kingdom is eternal."

Over and over, throughout the Gospels, Jesus makes these distinctions between two kingdoms. Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection we find ourselves confronted by the question, "Which kingdom parade will we choose to follow?" One is covered with shiny gold and promises fame and fortunewhile the other is.... everlasting light and life.

I want to end with a Franciscan blessing that invites us to move straight from receiving God's grace in Sunday worship to giving daily works of mercy and justice.

Let us pray:

**May God bless us with discomfort -
discomfort at easy answers,
half-truths, and superficial
relationships so that we may
live deep within our hearts.**

**May God bless us with anger —
anger at injustice, oppression, and
exploitation of people, so that we may
work for justice freedom and peace.**

**May God bless us with tears —
tears to shed for those who suffer from
pain, rejection, hunger, and war,
so that we may reach out our hands
to comfort them and
turn their pain into joy.**

**And may God bless us with foolishness —
enough foolishness to believe that we can
make a difference in this world,
so that we can do what others
claim cannot be done. Amen.**

Benediction

**As we enter Holy Week, let us be willing
to continue the work of the kingdom of
God and protest injustice where needed
on behalf of Jesus.**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus
Christ, the love of God and the
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you
now and forevermore. Amen**



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