

**[OFF]** Usually on Palm Sunday, by the time the palm parade with the kids is over, the pastor wastes no time in rushing the congregation on through the rest of Holy Week, eager to get to either the Last Supper, the betrayal of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, or even all the way to Good Friday and the crucifixion of Jesus. Why? Because fewer and fewer churches are marking Holy Thursday and Good Friday with special worship, and even fewer people are participating in them. That means that if we don't tell the story of the rest of Holy Week on Palm Sunday, then many in the congregation on Easter Sunday will have arrived to hear the Good News of the resurrection without ever having heard the reason why the resurrection was necessary. That's even more true for the many who attend worship mainly on Christmas Eve and Easter morning.

So that's why pastors do that. This year, however, I'm not rushing to Good Friday. I have a feeling we've all been living in the darkness of the tomb more than just a little over the past weeks. So instead, I think it's important for us in this time of chaos to linger at the palm parade for a while, to allow ourselves to marinate in the celebration of Jesus as the Prince of Peace. And there is plenty to celebrate, because that parade wasn't just a pointless festival for people who didn't know that Jesus was going to die. The palm parade was a celebration of Good News, because Jesus truly did come as a king to deliver his people, in an unexpected yet even more powerful way.

For those of you eager to hear the whole story of Holy Week, fear not. You can find the complete details of Holy Week in the concluding chapters of our four Gospels, and we'll also be leading you through the final days in our Holy Thursday Facebook Livestream on Thursday at 7pm. If you're not familiar yet with the way our livestreams work, you can either log in for the livestream itself with your Facebook account with the option to comment in real time, or you can wait until after the livestream is finished, when it will be posted on Facebook with a link on our website as well. You don't need a Facebook account to watch the posted video. When Facebook prompts you to log in, just dismiss the dialog box.

**[SHARE: Working from Home Picture]** I'm not going to say that we've all found a new normal yet, but I will say that those I've spoken with are beginning to adjust and are

finding new ways to work and worship. At my home, we're blessed to have three levels to spread out in, all of which have a strong wifi signal. That's perfect for us, because Jana is seeing clients virtually on the upper level, Carolyn is connecting with her math colleagues and students on the main level, and I've set up a Zoom studio with my portrait photography gear and some trouble lights in the unfinished basement. Yes, it's cold down there, but in another month, you'll be envious!

**[OFF]** Those of you who have a smaller living space, large families, large pets, or no computers or internet might be finding it harder to adjust. Those who are especially vulnerable to the potential complications from the virus may be finding it harder to adjust. Those of you who have been furloughed or laid off may be finding it harder to adjust. And those of you who are still working where you unavoidably come into close contact with other people most certainly must be finding it more difficult to adjust. Nothing has magically made things easier for anyone in the past week, and the world continues to struggle, grieve and adjust.

But our grief doesn't preclude us from, paradoxically, also finding hope and joy. Those things can coexist, as strange as that might seem and feel. Soul Song Counseling passed around a Facebook post from Holistically Grace this past week entitled "Yes, AND." It captures some of the paradox of these days, reading: "Yes, we can feel grateful AND disappointed about things being cancelled. Yes, we can enjoy extra time with loved ones AND feel overwhelmed by their presence. Yes, we can be hopeful AND feel like everything is falling apart. Yes, we can be a source of support for others AND prioritize our needs, fill our own cup." We have complicated thoughts and feelings, made as we are in the image of God who understands us so very well. So as we look to Palm Sunday for hope, please understand that this in no way is an attempt to diminish your experience of pain. We are Yes, AND people living YES, AND lives.

**[SHARE: Bill's Feet on the Stone Beach Picture]** If I asked you to draw a picture of what "peace" looks like, a wonder what you'd draw. I can't draw, in fact I can barely write my own name, but I can take pictures. Here's one of my pictures of peace, and yes, those are my feet. I shot this picture with my iPhone in 2018 while laying on a pebble beach on the North Shore of Lake Superior near Tettegouche State Park on a Sunny June day. The rocks

were warm to the touch, the water was quite still, and there wasn't another person besides my wife in eyesight or earshot. We had just enjoyed lunch at a nearby café and I could have easily stretched out for nap. Even now when I look at it, I feel peace. What about you? What picture of peace would you draw, or photograph, or describe? Maybe for you it would be five minutes alone in your own home! Or maybe it would be a crowded house filled with all your grandchildren. Peace can look different to various people and at various times.

**[OFF]** When Jesus entered Jerusalem on that day we now call Palm Sunday, he entered both as a King and a Prince, and so the people gathered along the road we're right to call out to him, to praise him, to lay down their cloaks and wave their branches. They were right to call him a King, and we're right to do that again today. "Hosanna!...Hosanna in the highest heaven!"<sup>1</sup> There was, however, a bit of a misunderstanding, because the people didn't understand the full extent of their need. They understandably assumed that their King would come to deliver them from their Roman occupiers. The prophet Zechariah seemed to have promised this, painting a picture in chapter 14 of Jesus standing on the Mount of Olives and splitting the mountain in half, victorious over Jerusalem's enemies. It didn't escape the attention of the crowds that day that Jesus had come to Jerusalem through Bethany, located on the Mount of Olives.

But Jesus, as we now know, was to be a different kind of King. The clues were there for the crowd to see had they had eyes to see that day. Military kings rode into town on a horse when they intended hostile action, but a donkey when they wanted to signal submission. Mark writes that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt, which today we'd think of as a horse, but as John and Mathew make clear in their own accounts, the term here was used of a young donkey. In other words, Jesus never intended a military coup, something he had made clear many times with his words and actions. Rather, Jesus arrived as the Prince of Peace, announced by the prophet Isaiah when he wrote, "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us...And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."<sup>2</sup>

**[SHARE: Misty Sunrise Picture]** Here's another picture of peace, this one from a

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 11:9-10. NRSV

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 9:6. New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

family canoe trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area at the end of August in 2006. I shot this picture one early morning, sneaking out of the tent before anyone else was awake and grabbing my camera even before I started the coffee water, which is saying something pretty significant about my priorities that morning! The morning was absolutely still, and the warmth of the sun was generating this gorgeous mist that hung over the water and in front of the trees. It doesn't really matter if being in a canoe isn't your speed- take yourself in your mind's eye to the most peaceful place you can imagine. Remember what that feels like and sounds like. I'm guessing that it may have been awhile since you've felt that kind of peace.

**[OFF]** As we celebrate Palm Sunday today, and as we steel ourselves for the difficult road through Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the endless days of waiting out the coronavirus, let's pause to celebrate that Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem, and even knowing that it would cost him his life, he entered on the back of a donkey to bring us peace with God and the world we live in. There is no Easter without Good Friday, but for today, let's bask in the glory of praising the Prince of Peace. "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!...Hosanna in the highest heaven!"<sup>3</sup>

**[SHARE: Reflection Slide]** Please take a minute now to reflect on you will find peace in Jesus, today and in the days to come.



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<sup>3</sup> Mark 11:9-10. NRSV