

WHO ARE YOU FETCHING FOR?

The Reverend David O. Guss, Pr.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
Hallandale, FL

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Coral Gables, FL

St. Timothy Lutheran Church
Miami Gardens, FL

March 25, 2018 – Palm Sunday

Children's Sermon: *Jesus, Please Be King of My Life!*

Object: A palm

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

Good morning, boys and girls. As you know, this morning is Palm Sunday. It's the day that we celebrate Jesus coming into the city of Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem know about Jesus. They think that he is a great teacher, and a very special person, and they want Jesus to be their new king. So the people are very excited when they see Jesus riding into the city of Jerusalem. To welcome him, they wave palm branches at him, and throw their coats down in the road so that Jesus' donkey won't have to walk on the rough stones. And, as they wave the palm branches, they yell and cheer for Jesus.

But, why did they wave palm branches? Well, in the Jewish culture, palm branches were a sign of *victory*, a sign of *joy*. They were often used to welcome great heroes or kings. And, did you know that just like a king wears a crown, the palm tree has a crown, too? That's right. The palm tree doesn't grow branches along its trunk. It only has a bunch of branches growing out of the very top of the tree. This bunch of branches at the very top is called the crown. So palm trees wear a crown. And, the people waved palm branches at Jesus because they wanted him to be their king, to *wear a crown*. But, Jesus didn't want to be a king on earth; he already had a kingdom in heaven. And, he can be king of your life and my life, if we just ask him. Let's pray this morning and thank Jesus for being the King of our lives.

DEAR LORD: Jesus, thank you for being king of my life. Please be king of my life forever.
Amen.

AND, MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING, KEEP
YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD, AMEN.

There is a time-honored story about a little boy who was sick. It was Palm Sunday and the children waved palm branches to open the service. But, this young man stayed home from church with his mother. His father returned from church holding a palm branch. The boy was curious and asked, “*Dad, why do we wave palm branches on Palm Sunday, and why do they call today Palm Sunday?*” Dad explained, “*You see, son, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved palm branches to honor him, so we got palm branches in the worship service today.*” The little boy replied, “*Awe, Shucks! The one Sunday I miss church, Jesus shows up.*”

Well, I’m confident that Jesus has shown up today in our hearts with the same excitement that was evident when the crowds welcome Jesus’ ride into Jerusalem over 2,000 years ago. Someone has compared the reception Jesus received to a ticker-tape parade in New York City honoring heroes and celebrities. Some of our young people might wonder what ticker-tape is. For those who may never have seen the stuff, ticker-tape refers to long, narrow strands of paper, with holes punched in them. These strands of paper once carried information for brokers and investors about the performance of the New York Stock Exchange. machines that read this information were like an early computer, all very modern in the 1st half of the 20th century. But, there was a problem - what do you do with all this tape once it had gone through the machine reader. That’s when the idea came about to stage a parade to honor heroes and dumping ticker-tape out the window.

Actually, the greatest honor the city of New York could bestow upon an individual or say a championship sports team, is to throw a ticker-tape parade. Since the first parade in 1886, 204 of these celebrations have taken place. Since then 1000’s of tons of paper have descended on the heads of various kinds of heroes. For example, 3,474 tons drifted down on the first astronaut to orbit the earth, John Glenn in 1962. By the late 1960’s, the stock exchange upgraded to electronic boards, leaving them with little use for ticker tape. So, enterprising office workers resorted to shredding regular computer paper and throwing it out the window. Somehow this didn’t work quite as well. One year an overzealous office worker wanting to participate in a ticker-tape parade neglected to tear the pages out of a phone book. Instead, he threw the whole phone book out the window striking a passerby and knocking him unconscious. Maybe that’s 1 reason ticker tape parades are less common nowadays. Another reason might be that now many office buildings are built with sealed windows which are not intended to be opened. Nevertheless, today, I want you to imagine the exhilaration of a ticker tape parade on a smaller scale in Jerusalem in about 30 A.D. as Jesus is coming to town.

In your mind, visualize the scene. Let your ears be filled with the beautiful synchronized sound of “*Hosanna to the Son of David!*” “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*” The account of Palm Sunday is 1 of the few events in the New Testament that is recorded in all 4 gospels. Details vary slightly, as they always do when eye-witness accounts are the basis for reporting, but the major details remain intact. As we visualize this great event I want you to focus on 3 things: **1)** the manner Jesus entered the Holy City, **2)** the reaction of the crowds to his coming, and **3)** finally its meaning for us. **1st of all, notice how he came.** It was time for the Passover celebration. The Passover was 1 of the 3 feasts that Jews were supposed to attend in Jerusalem. As a

result, the population of Jerusalem swelled immensely. As a good Jew, Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover with his disciples. In preparation Jesus did something quite unusual. He instructed his disciples to borrow a young donkey upon which no one had ever ridden for him to ride as he entered the city. He also equipped them with a response in the event that they were questioned about taking the animal. They were to say, *"The Lord has need of the donkey and it and will sent back shortly."* It's interesting. Jesus and his followers had probably come by foot all the way from Galilee. But, now for the last 2 miles Jesus decided to ride a donkey. This was obviously to fulfill the prophecy found in Zachariah 9:9, *"Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."* So, without question, the disciples did as they were instructed. They procured the young donkey just as Jesus had said. In John 14:12, Jesus said to them, *"If you love me, you will obey my commands,"* and this they did. They heeded his commands.

After borrowing the colt the disciples placed their cloaks on it as a saddle for Jesus to commence his journey. This method of transportation is significant. Jesus didn't ride in a chariot or on a large and imposing horse. He rode on a small, young donkey, an insignificant animal generally thought of as a beast of burden. This was a metaphor, perhaps. In 5 days he would take on an even greater burden - the sins of the entire world. He would be spat on, beaten, mocked, jeered, and nailed to a cross. All of that may be symbolized by this lowly beast of burden, a donkey. On the other side of town, Pontius Pilate was entering Jerusalem about the same time on a horse, the symbol of war and power. Jesus rode a donkey as a symbol of peace and humility. In Luke 14:11, Christ taught, *"those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."* Jesus only practiced that which he preached. So, notice the manner in which he came.

In the 2nd place, notice the reaction of the crowd. Mark notes that as Jesus entered the Holy City, many spread their cloaks on the road while others spread branches cut from the fields (John is the only Gospel that describes the type of branch as being palm branches). Victorious kings in biblical times were honored in this fashion. Many in the crowd were welcoming a king who they thought would lead them to victory over the established order. They did not realize Jesus' kingdom was not of this world. For many in the crowd who were singing, *"Hosanna in the highest,"* this was a moment of splendid adoration. For the cynics, they criticized by saying - a donkey, peasants throwing down branches???. He may as well have driven up in a banged up Volks Wagon van from the 1960's. We prefer our royalty in a Rolls Royce, or at least a Mercedes. But, then we have to remember, the values of this world are not the values of Christ's kingdom.

In any event this ecstatic type of worship reminds us of the fickleness of human beings and how often we straddle the fence. Jesus is worshipped 1 day by the crowds, but in a few days these same people who are singing, *"Hosanna"* will be shouting, *"Crucify him."* Not everyone who sings praises to Christ can be counted on when the going gets rough. When the going gets rough, we so often see in the church today - the tough get going. On Palm Sunday, the crowds are in a celebratory mood but when tough decisions had to be made, the

touch folks disappear. It makes us ask, why did some people even come that day to hail Jesus as their king. It even makes us ask why we come to church on Sunday morning when 1 day we are acting all *"praise and worship-y,"* but the next day we are out there sinning like nobody's business. In Matthew 16:15-17, Jesus questioned his disciples. He said to them, *"And who do you say that I am?"* Simon Peter answered, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* And, Jesus answered him, *"You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven!"* Jesus did not want Peter and his other disciples to believe he was the Son of God just because he said so. He wanted God to bring them to this conclusion, based on their experience with him. Well, sisters and brothers, this is truly why we come to church - to know Jesus, to experience Jesus to be in relationship with him.

And, all of this discussion brings us to the last thing we need to see this morning: What does Palm

Sunday mean for us. The story is told about a pastor who 1 Sunday brought on to the stage a beautiful Golden Irish Setter that belonged to his youth pastor. The youth pastor loved this dog so much that when the dog had been sick and had to be in the vet kennel overnight, he stayed all night with him. Needless to say this dog also loved his master. The senior pastor brought the dog on to the stage and he rolled a ball across the platform and said, *"Fetch, Josh, fetch."* But, the dog just sat there and would not fetch the ball. The pastor then had 1 of his friends, a large body builder come up on the platform. This huge muscleman told the dog, *"Fetch, Dog, Fetch!"* But, the dog would not fetch the ball for the powerful man. The pastor then had a beautiful young woman come on the platform. She patted Josh on the head and said, *"Josh, please get the ball for me."* The dog did not flinch or move. Finally, he called the youth pastor on to the platform, the young man who owned the dog. The youth pastor said, *"Josh go get the ball."* And, the dog immediately bolted from his stance and retrieved the ball and gave it to his owner. The preacher began his sermon by saying to his congregation, *"Let me ask each 1 of you this morning - who are you fetching for?"* Pretty good question. Who is the master in life you are following?

Over 1,000 years ago, an Italian bishop named Theodulph, wrote a poem as a prisoner from his jail cell that Christians have been singing ever since to remember the day Jesus entered Jerusalem. The words go like this: *"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, Thou David's royal Son, Who in the Lord's name comest, the King and blessed One."* As you reflect on those words which we sang earlier this morning, as you reflect on who you are fetching life for as your master, I hope you will not only find yourself in the crowd today welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem today, but I hope that you will continue following Jesus this week, sit with him at the Last Supper this Maundy Thursday, go with him to the cross this coming Good Friday, and then as we approach Easter day, continue welcoming him into your heart singing, *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,"* today, now, and forever more." Amen.

