

“Jesus, Remember Me”

John 12:12-16

Sermon notes from the pulpit of
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The Palm Sunday parade appears in each of the four gospels. We are not given the best detail about what those in the crowd were thinking. I wonder. I wonder if you'll wonder with me.

What is Peter thinking? He's blustery and bold. He's brave and outspoken. When Jesus said, it is on this rock that I will build my church, he was talking about Peter. Peter may have felt like the steward of this parade. He may have been shooing people in line, attempting to impose a little order. Peter may have thought himself Jesus' body guard. He was keeping an eye out for the authorities who might come with clubs. An arrest might be forthcoming. Or an attacker of some kind. "If anybody is going to try to harm Jesus, they'll have to come through me." He may have been the least responsible of the disciples; instead, he may have been the most childlike. He may have given himself over to abandon, to dancing, like we recently danced with our glad friends in Cuba. He may have shouted louder than anybody, "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna" until he was hoarse. "HOSANNA! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

Where's Judas? Judas is there, we presume. Judas may have been thinking the time is drawing nigh. Jesus will usher in God's kingdom any minute. Jesus will unleash God's army of angels and they will swoop down in chariots of fire, whipping the Romans and anybody else standing in the way of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Some believe Judas was an evil traitor who betrayed Jesus with, of all things, a kiss. Many other scholars believe Judas was simply eager to do his part to speed things along. The sooner Jesus got arrested and forced into a tight spot, the sooner God would come to rescue his son, the sooner God's new heaven and new earth would be established. Surely Judas is in the parade. Is he happy, swept up in the moment? Or is his mind going in a thousand directions? Is he plotting his plan to force Jesus' hand. "Hosanna, in the highest." Jesus will save us, and I'm going to do my part to help.

Is Mary there? A mother is always looking out for her child. She might be worried. "Jesus, you've never been good with donkeys. Be careful, you could get thrown off. It's chilly today. Did you bring a jacket?" Mothers have a way of worrying even when there's nothing to worry about. Is there something to worry about today? Where is this parade leading? This parade doesn't have a permit. Not everybody may be happy with this impromptu protest march. Somebody might get hurt. Everybody is calling Jesus a king. They might be right. But she's right, too. Jesus is her son. And she has a right to worry. Everyone shouts Hosanna. Mary says quietly, like a prayer, *be careful son*. Surely, she knows, this crowd can turn on her son. This crowd can hurt him. Or worse.

The disciples, and maybe some in their families. Mary, Mary Magdeline and the other women. Hangers on. Well wishers. People looking for a good time. Many joined in that parade, and perhaps many more watched.

Where are you? And what are you thinking?

You might be leaning against a post. Standing in the warm sun, watching the play of shadows on the city wall. Are you shouting from afar? Are you waving your palms, making a show, having a little fun? Did you throw your new coat on the ground so that donkey doesn't touch the ground? The Pope has the pope-mobile. The King of England travels in Rolls Royce. The president is always separated from us by bullet proof glass. Jesus, the king of the world, is plodding along in the open air on a donkey.

Do you feel the electricity of this moment? Jesus is doing a political thing, and we don't like to mix politics and religion. Jesus is thumbing his nose at the powers that be. Jesus is making a scene, encouraging behavior that could be interpreted as impolite. Jesus is openly mocking other leaders who ride into the city on chariots and steeds surrounded by armed guard. There's nothing subtle about this parade.

And, to be honest, he's walking down the road to ruin, and we know it. We know the protest will be squashed. And this path leads ultimately to a cross for its leader. Others in the crowd don't know this, but we know. We know.

We get the idea that Jesus like parades.

When Jesus parades into our hospital room, sits down beside our bed, and touches our arm, we want to clap. If we're able to walk, we'll gladly get out of bed and follow him around the halls to every room while he greets everybody with love and healing in his touch.

But if Jesus parades into our living room while we're arguing with somebody in our family, and he says, "Stop being so mean" we're not so happy. *Who are you to tell me what to do, Jesus? You don't know what it's like to be married, to have kids.* This is a parade we don't want to join.

We want Jesus to love us, sure. We aren't interested, maybe, in his judgement or his correction. We'll follow him anywhere—if we can fit it into our schedule, and so long as he doesn't get too demanding. We're religious, after all, but who likes a fanatic?

Plenty of those around us are shouting *Hosanna*. It's a shout of jubilation, which means—sort of—*save, rescue, savior*. People around us are saying this with respect, with anticipation. Notice how some of us are crying? Notice how the children chase each other with palm branches, swatting each other with them, slashing them against the sky, dancing? We can't dance like children, can we? We can't be that happy, can we? We're too buttoned down to do anything with that kind of abandon, aren't we?

"Look! Your king is coming," the crowd says.

And what about our loyalties? We are loyal to so many things. Loyal to our basketball team—of course we are. We are loyal to our point of view, so much so that some of us have become too brittle to talk to about other points of view; we've become too narrow-minded to try on other thoughts for size. Is this because we are afraid, or just arrogant? We are loyal to our friends and family, naturally. There's nothing wrong with being loyal. Jesus is clearly loyal to his friends. The problem is when our loyalties get in the way of our loyalty to God. Notice how Jesus is not letting his loyalties to others get in the way of what he has come here to do. He's not choosing the easy thing here—and we would understand if he did. This short ride on that donkey is the longest journey, so far, he's ever undertaken.

"Look," the crowd says. "Your king is coming."

Do we believe that? Is our loyalty focused wholly on the one sitting on the back of that donkey? If so, what's holding us back from joining this parade? What other loyalties hold us back?

John tells us that the disciples didn't really know what to make of this parade until long after the events of this week had taken place. But after things settled, they saw the significance of this parade. Jesus rides into the middle of our hearts right down the main street of our lives. Jesus steals the scene. He didn't come take power—as the disciples may have misunderstood then. He came *with* power, to speak truth to power, and this power could not be denied, and would not stay nailed to a cross. This made sense to the disciples only in the looking back, after the ringing hosannas died down, after those faithful women found that the tomb was empty.

In the looking back, the disciples understood that this is what the reign of God looks like: rag tag, upside down, children leading the way, people coming together to love as our savior loves, marching, marching together to make a joyful noise.

Those who claim to be faithful cannot de-radicalize this parade.

But we can join it.

We join parade. We join the hosanna chorus. We've come to love, we've come to serve, we've come to listen, we've come to heal, we've come to sing, we've come in the name of the one who leads us riding on a donkey. *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord* bringing these gifts of love and service, sharing these gifts so generously, setting the example, inviting us to join, to sing, to serve, to say: *Hosanna in the highest*.

AMEN