

**A Sermon Preached at The Church of the Resurrection
April 5, 2020
Palm Sunday
Matthew 21 1-11, Matthew 27: 11-54**

Every 4th of July, we spend time in Monteagle, Tennessee at our family home. On that day there is a picnic and a parade. All my little cousins decorate their bikes – some still with training wheels - with flags and streamers. I have pushed all of them on the parade route, watching the wheels of their bikes get stuck in the gravel. You can only imagine the tears and sadness, until magically their training wheels are “unstuck” and back into the parade they go. Until this happens all over again. I can’t wait for this year’s parade!

The Gospels of Palm Sunday presents us with two parades. The first parade is into Jerusalem from Bethany on a Sunday. This parade was hopeful, no training wheels needed. People hoped Jesus would triumph, that His followers would put Him into power and everyone hoped He would get rid of the Romans. It was a parade of celebration, a parade to celebrate a new leader!

Jesus comes to Jerusalem. He’s just performed a miracle, He

raised Lazarus from the dead. He's on a roll, everyone is talking about how amazing He is. He heals! He preaches! He teaches! All the people are amazed by Him, and now He is coming to Jerusalem, to the great Temple. And He must make a grand entrance, so He sends the disciples ahead to fetch Him an animal to ride in on, actually two, a donkey and a colt.

I sometimes wonder whether He sort of stood up with the two animals, with one foot on each, like a trick rider in the circus, or whether He rode for a while on the donkey, then switched over to the colt. But notice how this is the first time He ever seems to travel anyplace other than by foot. Something different is happening, something that doesn't really fit into who Jesus is. And anytime that happens, something that doesn't fit, it makes us uncomfortable. We know something bad may be happening here.

Then He rides into Jerusalem, and everybody's yelling and screaming with joy, waving branches of trees around, and putting them on the ground so Jesus doesn't even have to put a foot on the dusty ground. But didn't Jesus spend the past three years walking

from place to place, no one laying out a carpet of branches to protect his delicate feet? And sometimes people were mean to Him, and sometimes those Pharisees were there trying to trick Him with weird legalistic questions.

Now Jesus is riding into town and everyone is saying He is the prophet, the anointed one, the one coming in the name of the Lord. Despite the fact that Jesus avoid fame and glory throughout His ministry. Despite the fact that He often said, don't tell anyone about what we are doing. But now He seems to accept the acclamations of the crowd.

Jesus, the very son of God, the one with the power to change the world, knows the change that is occurring. The crowd's applause, the branches, the ride, they are all signs that the end is near, because Jesus knows they will turn on Him. Jesus knows He will die.

The second parade was from Jerusalem outside the walls of the city on the following Friday. This was a different type of parade, it wasn't a celebration at all and the training wheels were

getting stuck constantly. Jesus carried His cross, crowned with thorns, mocked and bullied, tortured, and He was aware that He was about to be killed.

We transition, with the crowd, from shouts of praise and Hosanna, to the Passion Gospel where we cry out “Crucify him!” We learn that the very people who cheered for Jesus’ as He entered Jerusalem were the very people who cheered at His crucifixion when they realized that this was not the Messiah that they wanted or expected. This Jesus. He was not the Messiah that they expected and it was not a kingdom they wanted any part of. And so they turned on Jesus and in less than a week, an angry mob will cry out to Pontius Pilate, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

The Passion story is very different; in fact, it is the complete opposite of a 4th of July parade. It is filled with drama, pain, and deep sorrow. How can we so quickly move from a celebration parade and want to be a part of the crowd that welcomes Jesus, to not want to be a part of the crowd that sends Jesus off to His death.

The passion narrative is a very tough story to listen to because we don't want to identify with any of the people who in any way contributed to Jesus' horrific death. We don't want to identify with even the good people in the story because they had to stand by helplessly as the person they loved died in agony. The truth is we are those people! We contribute to His death, even as we love Him. We must confess to the fact that we really do not want to go from palms and fond memories of being a part of the celebration to experiencing Jesus die in such a terrible way. But, to reach the joy of Easter, we must participate. No, scratch that, not participate, embody what our Jesus experiences all because He loves us so much.

We want to move from celebration to celebration, from joy to joy. We want to move straight from Palm Sunday to Easter, but we cannot, that is not how the story goes. The story is a bit more complicated than we want to admit. Jesus did not enter Jerusalem on a colt, lead the Last Supper, get arrested, stand trial, and die on the cross in 45 minutes. It took days, days of unimaginable pain

and suffering. We have to take the time to walk with Jesus through the story, it is the only way to truly honor Him and His suffering.

It seems to me after studying both Gospel lessons that Jesus seems to fear the first parade more than the second parade. Jesus doesn't want power. The real Jesus is apparent in the second parade. Jesus isn't hoping for power, Jesus just wants to love us and by loving us in the ultimate way He participates in the second parade.

Holy week is holy because it is a week of giving. It is a week of remembering all that Jesus gives for us in order to love us. My hope for all of us is to be a part of the second parade, even though it might look a little different this year. The palms from the first parade are beautiful, but the cross seems real. The cross is Jesus' love and I want to be a part of that parade. Training wheels and all.

Amen