

I

The sermon went something like this:

*It's Friday. Jesus is arrested in the garden where he was praying. But Sunday's coming.*

*It's Friday. The disciples are hiding and Peter's denying that he knows the Lord. But Sunday's coming.*

*It's Friday. Jesus is beaten, mocked, and spit upon. But Sunday's coming.*

*It's Friday. Those Roman soldiers are flogging our Lord and they press the crown of thorns down into his brow. But Sunday's coming.*

*It's Friday. See him walking to Calvary, the blood dripping from His body. See the cross crashing down on his back as he stumbles beneath the load. It's Friday; but Sunday's coming.*

*It's Friday. See those Roman soldiers driving the nails into the feet and hands of my Lord. Hear my Jesus cry, "Father, forgive them." It's Friday; but Sunday's coming.*

*It's Friday. Jesus is hanging on the cross, bloody and dying. But Sunday's coming.*

*It's Friday. Jesus is hanging on the cross, heaven is weeping and hell is partying. But that's because it's Friday, and they don't know it, but Sunday's a coming.*

You have heard the Palm Sunday story before and maybe you thought like I did that this is the exact opposite of the story of Good Friday. Because this was Sunday, Palm Sunday, and Good Friday's coming.

All the people were waving palms, throwing their cloaks, coats, wraps and Ralph Lauren sweaters on the pathway before Christ. It looked like someone had emptied the Salvation Army shed into the streets. People were cheering, "Hosanna, hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

The crowds ran to the palm trees and cut fronds from them and laid them before Jesus as he approached on a foal of a donkey. "Yay, Jesus. You're the messiah. Yay, Jesus. We saw you raise the dead. Yay, Jesus. You've come to save us. Hosanna. Hosanna!"

But that was Sunday and Friday's coming.

On Friday that same group of people would stand and scream, "Crucify him! Crucify him! That same group of people that yelled "Hosanna!" would five days later scream out for his blood. They would scream out that he be nailed to a cross. Does that surprise you? Does that shock you? If you were a disciple like Peter, James, or John or the other nine wouldn't you be surprised, possibly shocked, certainly dismayed, and definitely discouraged?

They shouldn't have been and neither should we because Jesus warned them and Mark recorded it in chapter 4 of his gospel. Jesus was teaching his disciples through parables, which are word pictures designed to teach a point. Mark wrote in 4:3-9:

*“Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.” Then Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

Jesus warned them that this is the way it would be. He told them who he was. He revealed he was the Messiah, the Christ. He cast out the seed that the Messiah had come. He did miracles to prove it. But some people were like the hard ground in the pathway of a garden. These people were so hard, so calloused, and so bitter to the truth that it would bounce off of them. The seed would lay on the surface waiting for Satan to sweep in and do everything he could to steal it away before it germinated, took root and grew. In the crowd that formed around Jesus’ triumphant entry there were Jewish religious leaders, Pharisees, who looked at what was going on, then weaseled their way up to Jesus and said, “Teacher, get your disciples under control!” These men hated him and they knew that if Jesus continued to live he would bring the powers of Rome down on their heads and with that their comfortable lifestyle, power, and prestige would be gone.

I can envision the Pharisees standing and watching. They knew they had to do something or Jesus would bring destruction on their way of life. You can almost hear Satan whispering in their ears with his venomous, sulfuric scented voice, “It’s Sunday...but Friday’s coming.”

There was another group who stood screaming, “Hosanna, Hosanna!” on Palm Sunday. These were the ones that had watched and listened to Jesus. Some were even there when Jesus called Lazarus from grave. They watched as the stone was rolled away and the dead man came forth from his grave clothes. They may have seen him make dinner for everyone out five loaves and three fish. A few may have been to the wedding where he turned water into wine. They were shouting with great fervency, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

These people though were like the seeds that fell among the rocks. They sprouted quickly. They saw a miracle here and miracle there and believed this was what the ministry of Jesus was all about. They jumped on the bandwagon quickly but once the heat of the hot sun, the pressure of the Pharisees, came upon them then they withered. The religious leaders pressed hard upon their congregations. They lobbied, cajoled, and threatened those they were in position to pastor. Yes, on Sunday these folks screamed for Jesus the king and then on Friday they screamed for him to be crucified. Yes, I can almost hear the Pharisees saying to their congregations, “It’s Sunday...But Friday’s coming.” Yes, on Friday you will not scream out Hosanna. On Friday you will not throw your coats at his feet. On Friday you will scream “crucify him” and they will rip his coat from his bloody back and cast lots to see who gets it. It’s Sunday now, Jesus’ followers, but on Friday you will do our bidding. It’s Sunday but Friday’s coming.

There was a third group mixed into the crowd. They ran to the streets stripping off their coats, grabbing palms, and throwing them at Jesus’ feet but they were like the seeds that fell among the thorns. The thorns or pressures of life grew up and choked them out. On Sunday they yelled, “Hosanna, hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” But that was Sunday.

On Monday, the bills for the new Passover outfits for the kids and that great new bonnet for mom came in the mail. How was he going to pay them all, and the mortgage and still buy food? Then on Tuesday, a Pharisee priest stopped by and said if they continued to follow this Jesus they would be excommunicated and shunned by their beloved fellowship. They would have no friends. They would have no center to their spiritual and social lives. They would be like outcasts. On Wednesday, as the family walked through the marketplace to get the supplies they needed for the Passover meal, they were ridiculed and mocked. They were called Jesus Freaks and people wouldn't wait on them. Finally, by Thursday when the good lady's husband came home early from work and said he had lost his job because his wife was at the Palm Sunday rally yelling out "Hosanna, Hosanna!" she lost her cool. She couldn't take the pressure anymore. She was distraught. When Friday came she was at the front of the crowd teaching her children a new phrase, no longer was she yelling "Hosanna!" but "Crucify him!" I can almost hear the leaders in the community whispering behind the cheering crowds as Jesus rode down the street on the back of a donkey, "It's Sunday...but Friday's coming."

In that crowd there were people who heard the word and it transformed their lives. It not only transformed their lives on Sunday when they sincerely yelled, "Hosanna, hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." It transformed their lives on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. They saw hope and a future. They found relief and salvation in this man who was the Messiah. Then on Friday they saw him judged and tried before Pontius Pilate. On Friday they saw soldiers beat him with a whip and press a crown of thorns into his head until blood rolled like tiny rivers down his face. On Friday they saw him carry his heavy cross through town and up a hill known as Golgotha or the Skull. On Friday they saw soldiers rip his bloody garment from his body and cast lots for it. On Friday they watched as he was nailed to a cross. On Friday they watched him die a cruel death. On Friday their lives had been ruined. On Friday their faith had been stripped away from them. On Friday their trust and belief was rocked as they watched him placed into a tomb. On Friday they wept great, bitter tears as the stone was rolled in front of it.

Yes, they were crushed on Friday. Hope was lost on Friday. Everything they screamed for on Palm Sunday was true but now their faith was pierced by the three nails and dashed on the sharp edges of his stony grave. On Palm Sunday they believed he was the Lord. On Palm Sunday they believed he came in the name of the Lord. On Palm Sunday they believed he was the Messiah. On Palm Sunday they believed everything they yelled as they cast palms at his feet. On Palm Sunday they believed it all as they stripped off their coats and threw them down for him to cross. But that was Sunday. Now, Friday had come and on Friday it seemed as if it had all ended. Hope was lost.

They stood around in dark rooms and hidden alleys talking and listening to one another ask, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Another would ask, "Were you there when they nailed him to the cross?" Another would ask through a tear soaked voice, "Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?" Yes, that was Friday. On Friday it seemed as if it were all finished.

Then like the soft wind or was it a gentle breeze, a voice, somewhere from the sky or maybe from the corner or maybe from within, but it was a voice. A voice as powerful and as soothing as if it came from God himself. It was as if the voice of God whispered—

“It’s Friday...but Sunday’s coming.”

Amen.

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II

Does anybody remember when pet rocks became a big fad in this country?

In April 1975, Gary Dahl was in a bar listening to his friends complain about their pets. This gave him the idea for the perfect “pet” -- a rock. Think about it. A rock would not need to be fed, walked, bathed, or groomed; furthermore, pet rocks would not die, become sick, or be disobedient. He said they would be perfect as pets, and joked about it with his friends.

But Dahl later took his idea further than simply sharing it with a few of his drinking buddies. He began selling ordinary gray stones bought at a builder’s supply store as pet rocks. These rocks were marketed like live pets, in custom cardboard boxes, complete with straw and holes to allow the pet rock to breath. He also drafted an “instruction manual” for a pet rock. It was full of puns, gags and plays on words. The rest, as they say, is history. (1)

Only in America, I suppose, could a gag like pet rocks become big business. The fad lasted about six months. Dahl, who died in 2015, sold 1.5 million Pet Rocks and became a millionaire. By the way, you can still buy a pet rock with a walking leash on Amazon for \$13.99. What a great country.

I thought about pet rocks when I thought about our lesson for today.

It’s been said that true Christianity is a radical experiment that has only been tried once, by St. Francis of Assisi, who gave up everything because of his love for Christ.

In one St. Francis story, St. Francis is on a pilgrimage, and he’s singing. Someone asks him where he’s going and he says, “I’m going to God.” They ask him where he’s coming from, and he says, “I’m coming from God.”

“And why do you sing?” they ask.

“I sing to keep from losing my way,” he responds.

Says Pastor Michael D. Powell, “That’s my image of Jesus as he’s entering Jerusalem. The sun is out, the birds are singing, dogs are barking and children are laughing. It’s a beautiful day for a parade, and Jesus is happy. He knows where he’s coming from and he knows where he’s going. His eyes are fixed on God, and there’s a song in his heart.”

(2)

That’s a heart-warming thought. It’s true Jesus knows where he’s coming from and where he is going, but he also knows there’s going to be a lot of pain in between.

Palm Sunday is Jesus’ coming out party. This is where he presents himself to the world as the Messiah. Every once in a while we have the opportunity to present ourselves to others--whether it is through a casual introduction, or a job interview, or a speaking engagement, or even a first date. Sometimes those presentations go well. Sometimes they don’t.

A young man goes to the boss of a company for a job interview.

“Well, well, well!” says the boss. “Just what I like to see in my company--a bright young man ready for a challenging position. And you say you’ve just gotten out of Yale. That’s my alma mater! Now, what was your name again?”

The young man replies, “Yones.” Yones who has just gotten out of Yale.

O. K., no more bad jokes for this morning. I can’t promise about next week, though.

Sometimes when we try to present ourselves to others, things go well. Sometimes they do not. Nevertheless, usually it is important to us that we make a good impression. They

say it's never too late to make a good first impression. How sweet it is when our efforts are met with success--when our efforts are appreciated and applauded.

Jesus is about to present himself to the Holy City of Jerusalem. His goal, as we noted, is to present himself as the Messiah. Up until this time, Jesus has been reluctant to make his mission official--somewhat like presidential candidates who spend so much time before the primaries dancing around whether they are candidates or not. We think of how many times Jesus has said to people up to this point something like, "Don't tell anyone what I've done for you. Don't tell anyone who I am, etc." But now the time . . . his time . . . God's time has come. The time of preparation is over and the time of presentation is at hand.

Jerusalem will be Jesus' big reveal--to use a term from the modern vernacular. If you are not familiar with this term, the "reveal," also known as "the big reveal," is a plot device in story-telling. It refers to the moment when a previously hidden key element of the plot is exposed to the audience. It is that "ah ha!" moment when you say, "So this is where the narrative is headed." Palm Sunday is Jesus' big reveal.

Jesus is headed to Jerusalem. He has come up from Jericho. As he approaches Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sends two of his disciples ahead, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'"

Jesus' instruction to these two disciples was to find him the colt of a donkey and bring it to him. Jesus was clearly fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy that the Messiah will ride a donkey (Zechariah 9:9-10). But what is the significance of the Messiah riding a donkey? Just this: All of Israel was waiting for a Messiah who would be a political revolutionary. They expected the Messiah to come riding on a horse with his sword drawn prepared to overthrow the Roman oppressor. They had somehow missed Zechariah's prophecy. In the days of Zechariah, when a king came riding on a horse, he was announcing his intention to declare war on his enemy. However, when the king came riding on a donkey, he was announcing his intention to make peace with his enemies.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey was an announcement that he had come to usher in a kingdom of peace. Riding on a donkey was a prophetic declaration of his purpose and mission, not just for Jews but for all of humanity. He came in peace, for peace and to bring peace--a peace that without Christ the world can never know.

Jesus had prepared all his life for this day. It was a divine appointment--so much so that even the owners of the donkey responded agreeably when they were told simply, "The Lord has need of it."

The Spirit of the Lord went ahead of the disciples and prepared the heart of the owners of the colt. There's good news in that as well. You see, when God has a plan and a purpose, nothing can stand in His way. If God says that His kingdom is coming, it's time for us to join the preparation committee.

E. Stanley Jones once told about a young man who was arrested for preaching the Kingdom of God. He defended himself by declaring that he was only preaching what Jesus had preached long ago. The prosecutor refuted his argument by saying, "But the Kingdom of God has not come yet."

"It has for me," the young man replied. And that's the way it ought to be. The Kingdom with its message of hope is at hand to those who believe. (3)

“The Lord has need of it.” That’s all it took and the disciples threw their cloaks on the donkey, making a saddle for Jesus to ride triumphantly into Jerusalem to begin the process of bringing in his kingdom of peace.

Jesus advanced down the west side of the Mount of Olives toward the city and was indeed welcomed by the crowd as their Messiah. They threw their cloaks on the road, forming a royal carpet as a way of showing their respect. The whole crowd of believers began to joyfully praise God for all the miracles that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! . . . Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

This is a direct reference to Psalm 118:26. Luke is the only gospel writer who uses the words “peace” and “glory.” The other writers used the word, “Hosanna,” which Luke’s Gentile audience would not have understood.

The fact that the crowds welcomed Jesus like this troubled the Pharisees and they told Jesus to rebuke his followers. To this Jesus replied, “I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” Imagine that, the stones or rocks crying out. I told you I would come back to pet rocks. If the crowds kept silent, all the pet rocks would be crying out, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Nothing can stop this movement, Jesus is telling them. If the crowds were silenced, even inanimate objects would be raised up to testify that he is the Messiah. All of history was preparing for this one single event, when he would be declared as king. Luke’s narrative clearly paints the picture that this was a divinely orchestrated event. He takes us on a journey to help us understand that nothing can thwart or frustrate what God has already predestined to happen.

Later, in Revelation 6:2, Jesus will be presented as one riding on a horse. That is when the kingdom of God shall come in all its fullness--a kingdom of peace and love, where every tear will be wiped away and every wrong will be made right. That kingdom will be particularly good news for those who are oppressed and those who suffer.

Bishop Stephen Bouman tells a story that I believe reflects that kingdom. He tells about his congregation in New Jersey which, in his words “began to find [its] power as a congregation” when it threw open its doors to the poor and the homeless. He mentions one man in particular. His name was Edgar. He lived alone in a nearby welfare motel “better known for drug addicts and prostitutes than for the righteous.”

For some reason, Edgar adopted Bouman’s church. It was not always a perfect fit--which is an understatement. Edgar was rough around the edges. On occasion, he got loud and demanding and was known to interrupt the sermon if he didn’t agree with something the preacher said.

Bouman says that, if the truth be told, his heart sank on Palm Sunday when Edgar was waiting in the sanctuary for him after a full day of pastoral responsibilities. He knew that Edgar wanted something--a ride, perhaps some of his time--and Edgar would be complaining about this and that. Bouman wanted to go home. He was tired. But by the grace of God, he did not get that opportunity.

On the drive to the motel, Edgar talked his ear off. They pulled into the parking lot of a rundown motor inn near a bridge. Then, in that most dismal setting, the most wonderful thing happened. A door opened and an elderly woman emerged from the motor inn. She knocked on another door and another elderly woman emerged. They limped toward Bouman’s car. They were joined by others waiting on the edge of the parking lot.

Then, for the first time Bouman noticed that Edgar had grasped in his hands some palm branches from that morning's church service. He had promised the folks at the motel that he would bring them some palm branches and he was delivering on that promise. There they were--mothers and their children, addicts, prostitutes, the mentally ill. As they surrounded the car, Bouman thought of Jesus' words, "Truly, I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the Kingdom of God ahead of you for they believed in Him."

"Get out of the car," said Edgar as he thrust the palms into his pastor's hand. "Give them the palms!" And Bouman distributed the branches among those waiting. "Bless them," Edgar demanded. And so Bouman blessed the palm branches. Then Edgar placed Bouman's hand on each forehead and pronounced a benediction. (4)

In my opinion, that's a beautiful picture of Christ's coming kingdom.

Here's what Palm Sunday says to us--nobody will be left out of God's kingdom regardless of the challenges they've faced in this life. See your king, God says to us--he's riding on a donkey. Thank God for that. Later--when it's time, according to Revelation 6--you'll see him on a white horse, but for now, on this occasion, it's a donkey. The Messiah comes with peace and humility.

But here's what's even more beautiful. Revelation 7:9-12 mentions palm branches again. And it's definitely about Edgar and his crowd . . . and you and me. We read, "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'

"All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!'"

Maybe Jesus **was** singing as he entered Jerusalem that day. He could see what lay ahead, yes, the cross--but beyond the cross to the resurrection . . . and his ascension to be with the Father . . . and then to Pentecost when the church would be empowered to carry out his ministry . . . and to today in 2016 when we would be gathered in worship to sing his praise . . . and then all the way to the end of time when all the saints of God will be gathered around the throne to sing God's praise forever. And, if any pet rocks are there, they will be singing, too. After all, Christ said on that first Palm Sunday as the people shouted out his praise, "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." This is of God, he is saying. And nobody can stop it. Amen.

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1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pet\\_Rock](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pet_Rock).

2. <http://www.ashlandmethodist.org/04-04-04.html>.

3. L. D. Johnson, *Images of Eternity*, compiled by Marion Johnson (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), p. 57.

4. [http://day1.org/715-lowrent\\_righteousness](http://day1.org/715-lowrent_righteousness).



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 little boy was curious and asked, "Why do we wave palm branches on Palm Sunday, Dad, and why do we call it Palm Sunday?"

"You see," his Dad explained, "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, "Aw, Shucks! The one Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up."

Well, I'm confident that Jesus will show up today, even though we will not be able to welcome him with quite the excitement with which the crowd in Jerusalem welcomed him 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 about the performance of the New York Stock Exchange.

As the information was entered by machines, holes were punched in the tape as it fed through, and other machines would read the information for the benefit of brokers and investors. It was sort of an early computer all very modern in the first half of the twentieth century. But there was a problem what do you do with the tape once it had gone through the reader and was no longer useful?

One cynic says since all that ticker-tape was waste paper and, even then, expensive to get rid of, some enterprising person had the bright idea of staging a parade for some hero and dumping the whole mess out the window. (1)

This is not quite true. Actually, the greatest honor that the city of New York can bestow upon an individual or a collection of individuals, 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 thousands of tons of paper have descended on the heads of various kinds of heroes.

In 1951, 3,249 tons of paper showered on Gen. Douglas MacArthur as his motorcade wended its way through streets of Manhattan. And 3,474 tons drifted down on the first astronaut to orbit the earth, John Glenn in 1962. (2)

By the late 1960s, 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 neglected to tear the pages out of a phone book. Instead, he or she threw the whole thing out the window; it struck a passerby and knocked him unconscious. Maybe that's one 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, for a few moments, I want you to imagine the exhilaration of a ticker tape parade on a much smaller scale in Jerusalem in about 30 A.D. Imagine the excitement and merriment that surrounds this occasion. Jesus is coming to town. Some say he's a great teacher. Others, a great healer. Still others say he's the Messiah, come to lead the people of Judea against the awesome might of Rome.

In your mind's eye visualize that 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!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Our minds will become encumbered with many somber and disturbing events if we let them wander beyond this day to the events of Holy Week. For a few moments, though, let's bask in this time of victory and glorious expectation that is Palm Sunday.

The writers of the four gospels allowed themselves that luxury. The account of Palm Sunday is one of the few events in the New Testament that is recorded in all four 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 three things: the manner Jesus entered the Holy City, the reaction of the crowds to his coming and finally its meaning for us.

**First, of all, notice how he came.** It was time for the Passover celebration. The Passover was one of the three 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 needs it and will send it back shortly."

It's interesting. Jesus and his followers had probably come by foot all the way from Galilee. But now for the last two 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 questioning the Master's request, the disciples did as they were instructed. They procured the young donkey just as the Master had said. In John 14:12, Jesus said to them, "If you love me, you will obey my commands," and this they did. How can you tell someone is a disciple of Jesus? They heed his commands.

After borrowing the colt the disciples placed their cloaks on it as a saddle for their master to commence his journey. This method of transportation is significant, of course. Jesus didn't ride in an ornate chariot or on a large and imposing horse. He rode a young donkey, a small donkey, an insignificant animal generally thought of as a beast of burden. This was a metaphor, perhaps. In five 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 young 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 second place, notice the reaction of the crowd.** Mark notes that, as Jesus entered the Holy City, many people spread their cloaks on the road while others spread branches they had cut in the fields (John is the only Gospel that describes the type of branch as being palm). Victorious kings were honored in this fashion in biblical times. Many in the crowd were welcoming a king. They anticipated that he would lead an insurrection against the established order. They did not realize his kingdom was not of this world.

While he rode into the city the crowd was singing, "Hosanna in the highest." Songwriters have done more to capture the beauty of this day than any preacher could possibly do. For many in the crowd that day, this was a moment of splendid adoration.

Of course, there were cynics, just as there are today. A donkey? Peasants throwing down branches? He may as well have driven up in a banged up VW van from the 1960s. We prefer our royalty in a Rolls Royce, or at least a Mercedes. The values of this world are not the values of Christ's kingdom.

This ecstatic type of worship reminds us of the fickleness of human beings and how often we straddle the fence. We see Jesus being worshipped here by the crowds, but in

a few days these same people who are singing, “Hosanna” will be shouting for him to be crucified. Not everyone who sings praises to Christ can be counted on when the going gets rough. They were in a celebratory mood here but when tough decisions were being made, such as choosing Jesus or Barabbas, the crowd would forget that just a few days prior they were hailing Jesus as their King.

Not even those who seemed to be close to Christ remained faithful when the crowd turned against him. One of his disciples denied him and another betrayed him with a kiss. But then Jesus said the tares and the wheat grow together and at the harvest they will be separated. I hope that on the day when that separation comes, we will be counted as wheat, don't you?

Of course some persons were there just out of mere curiosity. They were just following the crowd. They saw the excitement and wondered what was going on and just started shouting like the others. Writer Eric Hoffer once commented wryly, “When people are free to do as they please, they usually imitate each other.” We know that's true.

I read somewhere a story about a man in Utah who put this “follow the crowd” phenomenon to good use. He had bought a store but it was not doing well. No one came into his store to see his merchandise, so he had almost no business. He was on a main road so that wasn't the problem. People just didn't stop!

One day he got an idea. Knowing that most people do follow the crowd, he went out and bought several used cars and parked them in front of his store. Sure enough, now people stopped at his store and all kinds of people began to buy his stuff. They assumed that all the cars out front meant that this must be a great place to shop!

The same thing happens with churches. Some people are attracted to church because their friends are there. Nothing wrong with that it's a great first step. We come into worship for a variety of reasons. Some of us come into this room with a sincere desire to know God's will for our life. Others are still seeking a workable faith. Still others come because their family expects it. If I were to ask you today why are you here, what would your answer be?

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.

If you are still uncertain about who Jesus is, this is a great place for you to be. Walk with Christ for a while and see for yourself who he is.

## **That brings us to the last thing we need to see: What Palm Sunday means for us.**

More than four decades ago, Beatle superstar John Lennon caused a worldwide storm. Some of you know what I'm referring to. In an interview with the press, Lennon claimed that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. It was obvious at the time that the Beatles certainly weren't singing, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Though, led by Paul McCartney, they were singing, "In my times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me, whispering words of wisdom, "Let it be."

Now, more than four decades later, the Beatles former drummer Ringo Starr says he has found God after taking a long and winding road.

He admitted he lost his way when he was younger, both as a Beatle experimenting with marijuana and LSD and afterwards when he suffered alcohol and cocaine problems in the late 1970s. But the musician, who has since become a teetotaler swearing off of alcohol, drugs and quitting his 60-a- day cigarette habit says that religion now plays an important role in his life.

Starr, recently turned 70, said: "I feel the older I get, the more I'm learning to handle life. Being on this quest for a long time, it's all about finding yourself. For me, God is in my life. I don't hide from that. I think the search has been on since the 1960s. I stepped off the path there for many years and found my way back onto it, thank God." Yes, thank God. By the way, Starr wasn't speaking at a church when he made this confession. He was speaking at the Grammy Awards Museum in Los Angeles. (3)

I'm glad that as Ringo Starr has gotten older, he's also gotten smarter. It's a shame that sometimes people have to get in such a bad way before they realize there is a better way.

The Bible teaches us that there will come a time when God will reign in every heart. There will come a time when ever knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God. Palm Sunday prefigures that grand event.

Looking at the four Gospel accounts together, it becomes clear that the triumphal entry into Jerusalem was a significant event, not only to those people who were there to witness it, but to Christians throughout history. We celebrate Palm Sunday to remember that momentous occasion.

Over 1,000 years ago, an Italian bishop named Theodulph, was a prisoner in France. From his jail cell, he wrote a poem that Christians have been singing ever since to remember the day Jesus entered Jerusalem. Maybe you will recognize it. It goes 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." (4)  
He is our Redeemer King. He deserves our allegiance. He deserves our all.

[As we stand to sing this great hymn, I hope that in your mind's eye you will put yourself in that crowd welcoming him into Jerusalem. I hope that as you sing, you will also welcome him into your heart.]

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1. Michael W. Dominowski, Staten Island Advance.
2. New York Times, October 29, 1986.
3. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1248085/Why-Ive-turned-God-70-reformed-Ringo-Starr.html#ixzz36tvR9MKJ>.
4. Timothy Hart-Andersen, <http://www.ewestminster.org/sermon.asp?id=520>.

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