



## *Hosanna to the Son of David!*

*Palm Sunday*

*Matthew 21:1–11*

*“Hosanna to the Son of David!”*

*“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

*“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

*When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered,*

*“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

*April 9, 2017*

## **Thought for the Week**

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4-7 • Philippians 2:6-11 • Matthew 27:11-54

Customarily, most cities and towns around the United States set aside one day, usually in summer, to honor their heroes. We all know the usual process: we pack up folding chairs and head to main street and find a comfortable place on the grass to watch the parade: police and firefighters, people showing off their high speed cars, churches advertising their special programs, high school students praising their athletic teams. And somewhere in the middle of all this you will find the mayor of the city, riding his shiny convertible automobile, inviting all the onlookers to remember him in the next election. During all this, of course, marching members in the parade will throw candy to all the kids sitting near the sidewalk. Is there anything more typically USA? We love our heroes and delight in sharing a special day of recognition and admiration for them

We who are Community of Christ, of course, also have our heroes. We all remember so well a few short years ago when our President of our Church visited us. Countless numbers of people traveled to Blue Water Campgrounds to stand around the Tabernacle to get a close-up view (and maybe even a short conversation) of our Church President. A true hero indeed!

Heroic acclaim has been part of the life of most societies throughout the centuries: the Romans, for instance, always honored their returning generals and troops. They built huge arches on which the name of the general appeared in bold letters. If you travel to Rome today, for instance, you can still see the beautiful Arch of Titus, honoring the general who returned from Palestine after destroying the city of Jerusalem along with its famous temple in the year AD 70.

Interestingly, another parade had taken place in Jerusalem only some years earlier, less pretentious, perhaps, but yet very important to a small group of peasant folk from Galilee. They were gathered to honor their own hero, Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet well known for his preaching of God’s kingdom and his divine power to restore life.

Now he had come to Jerusalem to face the civil and religious powers of the temple and bring his message of God’s kingdom to all who would listen. He knew that he would face persecution, even death for his actions. Nonetheless, he meant to carry out God’s command. But for now at least he chose to celebrate his return to Jerusalem with his loyal friends.

So, here in today's worship we have the scriptural description of the Palm Sunday parade: the people cheered their hero, sang traditional hymns and waved palm branches they had taken from nearby trees. This was to be their day to honor the one who had come to declare the good news of God's kingdom.

Little did they realize of course that in three days this Jesus of Nazareth would suffer death on the cross at the hands of the Roman and Jewish religious authorities?

So, what could this central event in Jesus' life mean to us who can now look back on it and relive it each year at the beginning of Easter Week? In a real sense we today are also privileged to stand on the side of the road and welcome Christ back into our world to continue preaching the power and the glory of God's kingdom in our day. At the same time, we now know both sides of that fateful day, both the joy and the passion. In that sense then we are called to accept Christ's invitation to confront the powers of evil of our own time in whatever shape or form they may take. In short, it is not enough for us to simply celebrate the season, to march down the aisle in the church singing hymns and carrying palm branches on this Sunday. The real challenge begins when it is all over and the challenges of the world face us once again. Christ accepted both the glory and the suffering; he would ask us to do no less.

## Palm/Passion Sunday

I don't recall having this difficulty growing up way back in the day. In my congregation today was most definitely Palm Sunday. Sometimes we even had actual palm fronds for the kids to wave around.

While this "palm/passion thing" is a fairly recent trend for me (and my denomination, Community of Christ), it's actually not all that new for others. I've discovered the Revised Common Lectionary traditionally uses the Gospel passion narrative on the Sunday before Easter (this year it's Matthew's turn; the other two years in the cycle it's Mark and Luke; John's passion story is saved for use on Good Friday itself every year).

From a somewhat practical and realistic point of view, it makes a certain amount of sense. Not all that many folks attend a worship service in church each and every day of Holy Week, so retelling the story of Jesus' last supper, betrayal, trial, suffering, and death on the opening Sunday of Holy Week gives those people necessary background to better understand the Resurrection story on Easter Sunday.

Let's look at what Matthew tells us is going on in Jerusalem at the beginning of Passover. His account differs somewhat from the basics of the story provided by Mark (and also used by Luke) in that Matthew appears to be more detail-oriented, carefully setting the stage throughout the earlier chapters for his stunning conclusion beginning in chapter 21, and devoted to relating it all to the writings of certain Hebrew prophets. Three times previously in his Gospel Matthew foretells what's to come:

*"From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matt. 16:21 NRSV).*

*"As they [Jesus and his disciples] were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised.' And they were greatly distressed" (Matt. 17:22-23).*

*"While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised" (Matt. 20:17-19).*

Therefore, by the time Jesus makes his entry in Jerusalem it shouldn't come as a surprise to anybody reading Matthew where this story is headed. In other words, this isn't just a big celebration, the first-century equivalent to a flash mob. No, Jesus isn't merely going into the city, he's entering the holy city of Jerusalem on Mount Zion to confront his destiny and the principalities and powers lined up against him.