

SERMONS FOR HOLY WEEK

GUIDED *to the* CROSS



Palm Sunday
GUIDED TO HUMILITY



Maundy Thursday
GUIDED TO SERVICE



Good Friday
GUIDED TO SACRIFICE



Easter Sunday
GUIDED TO NEW LIFE



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PALM SUNDAY:
GUIDED TO HUMILITY

SERMON

- The **Sermon** is delivered by the pastor:

☐ Grace, mercy and peace to you, my dear Christian friends. Welcome to Palm Sunday. Welcome to Holy Week, and welcome to this last part of our journey being guided to the cross of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Palm Sunday seems to be all about this parade into Jerusalem, doesn't it? With all the waving of palms and the shouts of "Hosanna!" and the declarations of "Blessed is he." Cloaks are placed on the road. There seems to be a lot of celebration over the entrance of Jesus into the holy city.

But then we look at what Jesus is riding on. A donkey. A donkey? It does not seem right. It doesn't seem to fit. If this is a celebration, a happy parade, a victory parade, then shouldn't Jesus be riding on a big white horse? Shouldn't he be on a large and fancy float tossing out handfuls of candy and waving and smiling?

But he is not. He is on a donkey, a beast of burden, a work animal, a lowly creature, a mode of transport for the poor. Why is this important? Because it tells us that this is not a prideful parade. It is a humble parade. Jesus comes into his last week on this earth as a humble king riding on a humble donkey. This picture is a fulfillment of the prophecy from Zechariah: "Behold, your king is coming to you; humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). What is the message of this image of Jesus riding on a donkey? It is a message of humility, which sets the tone for the week to come.

Jesus comes to us on Palm Sunday in humility, not as a triumphant, regal, proud monarch. If we look back on Jesus' life, his parents, Mary and Joseph, most likely rode into Bethlehem on a donkey the night he was born in a humble manger there. So it is only natural that he comes to the end of his life on earth in humble fashion. Now as we look ahead to the days to come for Jesus, we are guided to the humility of the cross and the suffering he will experience along the way there. Crucifixion is a humbling, humiliating way to die, to be sure, and Jesus knew it was just on the horizon for him. So he begins his humble journey here on Palm Sunday.

Are there other hints of humility on this day? There is the cry "Hosanna!" that we hear. It sounds like hooray, but it is actually a cry for help. It means "Save us!" The people are desperate for rescue from their Roman occupancy, but whether they know it or not, the people are in more desperate need of rescue from sin and death. Therefore, there is an overtone of humility in the cry of "Hosanna!" Inwardly, people are feeling beaten down, pushed around, oppressed, under the thumb of other forces. They are in a humble position certainly.

Then think about the cloaks strewn on the road. These are obviously not fancy garments if they are allowed to get dusty and dirty like this. Only those with rather ratty, unkempt clothing would even consider putting what they are wearing under the feet of travelers from near and far. The placing of cloaks on the path in front of Jesus on the donkey is a humble act, something that is done out of selflessness and poverty. Yet this act, too, points to the humility of Christ on the cross soon to come. Jesus' feet will walk the Via Dolorosa in several days' time, the road to the cross. His cloak will be gambled for as he is nearly naked hanging on the cross dying. As the psalmist would predict, "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" (Psalm 22:18). Pretty humbling to have very few clothes and to have what clothes you did own sold in front of you, is it not? Cloaks on the road this Palm Sunday foreshadow that stark reality to come for Jesus.

Even the palm branches we wave have a humble aspect to them. You see how green and pretty they are now? Well, when we bring these home, as you know, they will soon dry out and turn brown and brittle. They will not look like this green color for long because they have been cut from the tree on which they grew, from the source of their nourishment and their vibrancy. Traditionally, as many of you may know, the dried-up palm branches from this Palm Sunday are later ground up into ash to be used to place on people's heads on the next Ash Wednesday, when the person placing the ashes there says to us, "You are dust and to dust you shall return." The palm branches become for us a humbling reminder that we are human, we are finite, we will die. But think about this: What shape are ashes in that are placed on our foreheads? They are in the shape of a cross. That indicates to us that it is ultimately the humble cross that will lift us up from our poor and miserable state as sinners and free us from the sin and death that are inevitable without the cross.

All of this brings us back to the cross. Palm Sunday, in fact, has a dual focus, one that looks at the palm parade and one that looks at the Passion (the suffering) of our Lord that is to come most prominently and spectacularly on the cross.