

Palm Sunday
April 13, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Triumphal Surrender

Luke 19:28-40 (EHV)

After Jesus had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹As he came near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ahead, ³⁰saying, “Go to the village ahead of you. When you enter it, you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹And if anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you will say this: ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³²Those who were sent ahead went and found things just as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴They said, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵Then they brought the colt to Jesus. They threw their robes on the colt and set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he went along, people spread their robes on the road. ³⁷As he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to praise God joyfully, with a loud voice, for all the miracles they had seen, ³⁸saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰He replied, “I tell you, if these people would be silent, the stones would cry out.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

We generally follow a three-year cycle of readings for the Sundays of the Church Year. For the Gospel reading we read from Matthew in the first year, Mark in the second and Luke in the third, with John sprinkled into all three years. Since we are in the Gospel of Luke this year, I will use the 24 chapters of Luke as an example. The first 18 chapters take us from the birth of Christ up to Palm Sunday. So, Luke covers a little more than 30 years over those 18 chapters. From chapter 19 to 24, Luke focuses on one week. Six chapters to cover one week. 25% of the Gospel of Luke is about just one week. The other Gospels are similar.

What is so special about this one week, beginning with Palm Sunday and ending with Easter Sunday? We call it Holy Week because it is set apart as the most important week in the Gospels. One could easily argue that Holy Week is the most important week in history, even more important than the week in which our God created the universe and everything in it. For it is during Holy Week that our eternal salvation is won. This most important week begins with Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem so that he could surrender his life to save the world. On this Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, we rejoice in the triumphal surrender of our King.

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As we meditate on Luke's account of Palm Sunday, pay attention to how Jesus is in control of everything that is happening. Nothing surprises him. He is not improvising a plan. Christ is making and following the plan. Therefore, he chooses this time to go into Jerusalem. He had for the most part avoided Jerusalem in his public ministry. He spent lots of time in Galilee but stayed away from the place where the chief priests, Sanhedrin, Sadducees and others had the power. Jesus would choose the date for his arrest. Jesus would choose the date for his crucifixion. Jesus would choose the date for his resurrection. Therefore, Jesus the Christ chose to enter Jerusalem publicly on Palm Sunday to begin this week that he had set apart as holy. His enemies would not be in control during this Holy Week.

Jesus demonstrated this to his disciples when he sent two of them into the village to bring a colt for him to ride. Jesus knew exactly what the disciples would encounter, what the owners of the colt would say and what the disciples should respond. They "found things just as he had told them." We could pass by this comment by Luke, but it is such a comforting thought and something that would have prepared the disciples for all that was going to happen to Jesus, especially on Thursday and Friday. Everything happened just as Jesus told them. Nothing was a surprise to Jesus.

We are surprised by lots of things. What will happen on your way home from church today? What will you encounter at school tomorrow or when you go to work in the morning? What does this year or the next ten years have in store for you? Good surprises, bad surprises, confusing surprises? We don't know. We are not in control of everything in our life. We are certainly not in control of the world around us. But the King of kings knows where a donkey's colt is in a small village and what the owners will say when his disciples untie it. Jesus, the King of the universe, is not surprised by the events that surprise us. Christ Jesus is in control of our eternal future, and he showed it to his disciples on Palm Sunday.

³⁵Then they brought the colt to Jesus. They threw their robes on the colt and set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he went along, people spread their robes on the road. ³⁷As he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to praise God joyfully, with a loud voice, for all the miracles they had seen, ³⁸saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Not only the Twelve, but many others who had followed Jesus recognized what Jesus was saying by riding a donkey into Jerusalem. Culturally, this was a coronation. Jesus was setting himself forth as the King. David had done something similar for Solomon. He put Solomon on his own mule to demonstrate to the people that Solomon was to be the next king (1 Kings 1). When the prophet Elisha anointed Jehu to be the next king of Israel, the people spread their cloaks on the ground for him to walk upon (2 Kings 9). When someone rides into Jerusalem with people spreading their cloaks on the road, everyone knows that the king has arrived.

Jesus makes the point even more clear by riding a colt on which no one had ever ridden. He clearly points the people to Zechariah's prophecy: "Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and brings salvation. He is humble and is riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9) Jesus is in control. He has chosen this day to reveal himself publicly as the King promised by the Lord God through the prophets. And the people believe! They respond with a verse from Psalm 118, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Everything is going to be good now that God has sent his Anointed King to rescue and rule over the people. Certainly, many of the people and even the Twelve were thinking about an earthly kingdom even now. They wanted a king who would drive out the Romans, reclaim the Jewish throne from the Herod dynasty, and bring about the peace and prosperity of the days of David and Solomon. We can fall into this false way of thinking when we go to Jesus primarily for earthly needs, when we think that following Jesus will give us a better earthly life. Many who followed Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday would have been shocked when the events of Thursday and Friday begin to happen, when their King surrenders to the enemies. May we learn to rejoice in the full account of Holy Week, as our King

saves us by surrendering himself to suffering and death.

The Sunday on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem as King was also the day when the Jews selected the lamb for Passover. They were to select the lamb that would be sacrificed and used in the Passover meal on the tenth day of the first month. The Passover would be celebrated on the fourteenth day, which would be Thursday of Holy Week, Maundy Thursday. Working back to the tenth day, we arrive at Sunday, Palm Sunday as lamb selection day. As Jewish fathers go into Jerusalem to select an unblemished lamb for their family to celebrate Passover, the Father in heaven has selected his Son as the Passover Lamb for the world.

Yes, Jesus is the King of all, worthy of praise in the highest. And Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God who gives up his life to save the world from sin. He is worthy of our praise for being King and Lamb. As we continue through Holy Week and meditate upon the institution of Holy Communion, the suffering of Christ and his death upon the cross, remember Palm Sunday. Jesus is the King who is in control of all things. He chose to go into Jerusalem at the time he wanted. He will choose to allow the soldiers and rulers to arrest him, mock him and beat him. He chooses to allow them to crown him with thorns. He willingly goes to the cross and allows them to pierce his hands and feet with nails. He chooses to give up his spirit and die for you and for me and for the whole world of sinners. The events of Holy Week are not an accident, not a surprise. Jesus was not in the wrong place at the wrong time. Our King was exactly where he needed to be and wanted to be in order to win our eternal salvation. His triumph over sin, death and the devil was accomplished by surrender.

Therefore, we praise him and soak in all he has done for us this most Holy Week. If we don't praise him, the stones will cry out.

Amen.