



we  
BELIEVE



# *Palm Sunday*

And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying,  
Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

MARK 11:9

# Sixth Sunday in Lent

## April 5, 2020

### **Gathering Thoughts:**

Dear Brothers and Sisters we continue to be the church in a difficult time and situation. We can continue to be the church even though we are worshipping apart in body, but gathered in spirit. May we continue to worship God and be the Church through acts of charity and love. I know that by God's grace and reassuring presence that we will come through this with a greater appreciation of the true meaning of being a church family. May we never lose sight of the importance to work together and hold strong to our faith. Until we meet again or go to a live digital service, please be safe and protect yourselves. Please feel free to share this service with others who may not have the same opportunity to worship

### **In Gathering let us join together in Spirit, so that we may affirm our beliefs:**

*We believe that God is continually at work in our lives and in our world:  
To heal strife and discord.*

*To comfort the lonely and grieving.*

*To encourage the disheartened.*

*To offer hope to those who despair.*

*To reconcile warring factions.*

*We believe that the same Jesus who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey:  
Enters our hearts today.*

*Triumphs might with the power of love.*

*Shows the way of strength through weakness.*

*Calls us his friends and family.*

*Invites us to share his life.*

*We believe that the Spirit has been given:*

*To remind us of our identity in Christ.*

*To empower us to take up the cross.*

*To enable us to abide in Christ's love.*

*To explicate for us the Word of God.*

*To enliven us as resurrection people in a fallen world.*

*This we believe so that we might joyfully share God's life and faithfully live as Christ's disciples. Amen.*

### **A Time of Prayer:**

Merciful Savior, it is our privilege and delight to be surrounded by your presence and to bring our praises and worship to you. You are our teacher and our friend, our rock and our hope and our strength and our light. We

celebrate your arrival in Jerusalem; we anticipate the agony that is before you; we await your victory over death. Grant that we might walk this journey alongside you as faithful disciples, rather than as participants of the fickle crowd. Amen.

### **Reading from the Scriptures:**

#### **Matthew 21:1-11**

21When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2saying to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3If anyone says anything to you, just say this, “The Lord needs them.” And he will send them immediately.’ 4This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

5 ‘Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’

6The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

10When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’ 11The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’

### **The Message: - Remembering Palm Sunday with All of it’s Quirkiness**

The closer we look at the world the more we realize just how crazy, just how “quirky,” of a place it really is. It has never been more evident than right now with all that is happening around us.

This is the premise of a book entitled *Quirkology: How We Discover Big Truths in Small Things* by psychologist Richard Wiseman. For example, it’s a quirky truth that the single guy in a bar who uses a strange, even weird, pickup line, is more likely than not to get the phone number of the girl he’s chatting up. According to Wiseman’s research, he’s totally wasting his time by asking, “Come here often?” Instead you should open with, “If you were a pizza topping, what would you be?” No kidding.

Quirkology is filled with all kinds of crazy insights. Here’s another: One’s last name has an incredible impact on one’s career path. Which is why, as Wiseman points out, there’s a disproportionate number of marine biologists named Dr. Fish.

Here’s another: According to Wiseman, the best way to spot a liar is not with our eyes -- as we’ve been taught -- but with our ears. When one is lying,

they'll give much less detail and almost never use the pronoun "I."

And another: People from Delhi are more helpful than Londoners.

Wiseman is driven by the belief that in life there's a reason for everything and a quirky cause behind every real world effect that we're forced to live with. The more quirks we know, the better equipped we are to navigate life, Wiseman asserts.

Plus, it makes us really interesting at dinner parties.

One could argue that Palm Sunday marks the quirkiest moment in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. On this day we're not celebrating one of his miracles or retelling one of his teachings. No. We're remembering the fact that Jesus once rode a "borrowed" donkey into Jerusalem, and that a crowd of bandwagon believers -- many of whom would later shout and harangue him all the way to the cross -- waved palm branches at him. Quirky.

And yet, in line with Wiseman's thesis, there's great meaning behind this great weirdness. There's meaning that can prove enormously helpful as we continue our mission to navigate life as one of Jesus' followers.

To modern ears, this moment is just weird. But it was not weird for a man, or a woman, in Jesus' day to ride a donkey. In third world countries today, this is still a common sight. But it was a bit on the strange side for someone purporting to be a king to enter the capital city on a donkey instead of a horse, as the provincial governor, Pilate, must have done about the same time.

If you were a first-century Jew, much of this would have made sense. God's people had been waiting for the Messiah. They'd been waiting for someone, sent from God, who would rule and change the world. In the Old Testament book of Zechariah, there's a prediction concerning the world's one true king and how he would make himself known: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9 ESV). Sound familiar?

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is his way of saying, "I'm that guy."

And as people responded with their coats on the ground, palm branches in the air and praise on their lips, it was their way of saying, "We agree." And if you're a follower of Jesus, we "agree" as well. "Jesus is that guy."

One of the more difficult aspects of Palm Sunday for us today is this whole idea of messiah-ship or kingship. We struggle to grasp the idea of living under the rule of a king. And if you're an American -- whose national identity was forged by opposing a king -- then it's in your DNA that life under an all-powerful ruler is not a good thing.

Many also have trouble with the male imagery of a king or lord, and this is a legitimate concern. But it's not like our congregations are unfamiliar with the concept of a king -- not with Queen Elizabeth sailing into her 90s

and Prince Charles lurking offstage, while -- in the meantime -- everyone is rooting for Prince William to be king, with Kate and the little princeling, George.

We know what a king is. We get that. The problem is that many Christians are a little uncomfortable using the word in a theological discussion.

But this unease can be helpful. Palm Sunday is a teaching moment to explain how God through Jesus desires to be the sovereign of our lives. Yes, the idea of a king, an absolute sovereign, having total power over our lives is not an idea we embrace. In our political system, we can't agree on health care, immigration and a host of other issues. So a ruler who -- at least in terms of the classical understanding of regency -- literally had the power of life and death over his or her subjects, well, it's unthinkable. This antagonism to autocracy and monarchies affects how we manage our stuff, how we determine our truth and how we make our decisions. We hate to be under the power of another.

But that's not how the kingdom of God works. True, a kingdom does not imply or suggest a democracy, free elections, 965 TV channels and The Daily Show. So, it's not a democracy. It's a Jesus-ocracy.

Therefore a big part of discipleship is learning how to submit our lives to the rule of Jesus who offered himself as Judah's sovereign 2,000 years ago. We know how that turned out.

Today, Jesus offers to be our sovereign.

So, what do we do?

Well, first we must learn to submit to his authority. Kings are sovereign, which means Jesus has absolute authority over absolutely everything. We see hints of this in the quirky instructions Jesus gives regarding colts and donkeys. [Jesus] sent two of the disciples saying, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once" (vv. 2-3).

Jesus' taking of the animal, which belongs -- let's face it -- to someone else, is an assertion of his kingly ownership. He even goes so far as to say, "If anyone has a problem with it, tell them the Lord wants it." In other words, he's not stealing because -- hey! -- he's the king, and as sovereign it's all his anyway.

There are two ways in which we submit to Jesus' authority. A) As the church, by having faith in his Word which he's given as his standard over our lives. As a Christian, there's no such thing as a private, personal life that's off limits to Jesus. He governs our bodies, our debit cards, our desires, what we look up on our phones, what we put in our fridges and how we work at the office. He is king and we look to him and say, "Lord, what is your will with all this stuff you've entrusted me with?"

B) We submit to his authority by showing respect for the other



authorities in this world that he's put in place to lead us. If Jesus is king it means that anyone who has any kind of authority in this world only has it because Jesus, the ultimate authority, has delegated it to them. This is true for presidents and prime ministers and the power they have over their people and even parents with the power they've been given over kids. Therefore, and this will sound really quirky to some, when we rightly submit to the authority of others we're actually honoring and submitting to Jesus.

There is always someone above us to whom we must be respectful. That doesn't mean that we can't disagree or even oppose in a lawful way our elected officials, or others in authority over us. There are ways to do that, and sometimes we should. Nor does this mean that there aren't times -- historical examples abound -- when even unlawful means must be used to resist injustice and oppression. In this case, one's obedience to the higher authority of the rule of God trumps the unjust and oppressive earthly authority. See Acts 5:29.

But, in our day-by-day experience, perhaps we've lost the ability or skill it takes to show respect. Agree or disagree?

When you go to the office your boss is what? The boss. The sovereign. If he says, "Hey, no bonus this year," you don't get to look at him and say, "I'm sorry, but can we vote on that?"

When it comes to the kids, mom and dad are what? The final authority. If your son does something stupid and you ground him, there's no free speech. He doesn't get to come to you and say, "Dad, with regard to my grounding, I've collected a series of signatures from my siblings supporting my immediate release."

Here's the deal: We honor Jesus when we are respectful, of others, even as he himself was respectful even as he was resisting religious and political authority right up to his death. On the cross, as he was dying, he prays that his enemies will be forgiven for "they know not what they do."

In summary: When Jesus offers himself to us on this Palm Sunday as sovereign, we can respond, first, by submitting to his authority (having faith in his word, and by being respectful of others he has placed in our lives).

Second, we can also accept Jesus as sovereign, not only by submitting to his authority but by finding peace in his protection. "King" is a military idea. In the ancient world, what often made you a king and kept you as king was your army. The size of your army is what kept the enemy away and allowed your people to sleep peacefully. To believe that Jesus is king is to believe that he is unmatched in his ability to love you, protect you and rescue you from all enemies. That's why, as Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people shouted "Hosanna" which means, "Lord, save us." They did so, because they believed that his power could bring their lives the peace they so desperately needed.

Do you know why it is that Jesus rode a colt -- a young donkey -- into Jerusalem rather than a horse? A king only rode a horse in times of war, when he was a king in battle. A king would ride a donkey when it was a time of peace. Jesus rode the donkey to tell us that life under his rule will not be

dominated by war and strife, but, for those who have faith in him, by a life dominated by peace! He will fight the most important battle -- with evil and death -- on the cross and defeat them both in the resurrection, offering us a life in which the biggest threats are already conquered.

Third and finally, when you live under the rule of a king you know that you have to treat him differently than you would anyone else. If the president of the United States walked into the room there'd be a sense of "awe," but you'd still just shake his hand as if he was an equal. Why? Because he's just one of us, put in power by us. It's one of the quirks of a democratic system.

But not so with a sovereign. There is majesty, royalty and an air of divinity. You don't shake hands with the queen of England. You show deference. Perhaps you curtsy or bow. You praise her when in her presence.

Why do you think the people laid their coats on the ground when Jesus entered Jerusalem? If Jesus really was the savior-king then they'd rather have him walk on their clothes than have his animal trudge through the dirt.

Why do you think we sing songs in church? Why do you think we stand as we worship and bow our heads when we pray? Listen to what Jesus says, in Luke's gospel, when some wondered aloud why the crowds praised him. "I tell you, if these [people] were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Luke 19:28-40 ESV). In other words, "If these people don't give praise recognizing their Creator, the creation itself will scream it."

Part of our job, as people of the Sovereign, is to show the world who its sovereign leader really is by bowing at his feet and shouting our praise. Even though the rest of the world may mock us, we praise him.

None of this comes easy to us. There's a learning curve to living under a ruler like Jesus. In fact, embedded in this story is a picture of what the struggle is like. It's not found in the crowds who praise him, but in the donkey that carries him. The Scriptures tell us that it was a colt that had never been ridden. An unbroken animal is terrible to ride; it wants to reject the rider and be free. Yet, because of whom Jesus was, this immature and untamed animal submitted to him and exalted him for his journey.

That's us. We're untamed and immature and prone to reject all riders. Yet we have been chosen to submit ourselves to Jesus so that, through us, the cities we live in might see him for who he truly is.

The bottom line is that on Palm Sunday Jesus comes to us as one who would be our -- fill in the blank. Are we ready to wave the palm branches, shout "Hosanna" and accept his leadership, mentorship, master-ship, lordship, sovereign-ship, CEO-ship?

Quirky. For sure. One could argue that Palm Sunday marks the quirkiest moment in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. And yet, in line with Wiseman's thesis, there's great meaning behind this great weirdness. Though the world might reject him, when we do the unmistakable, quirky work of giving him praise, submitting to his authority and allowing him to publicly

tame our unruly lives, the world will not be able to ignore him. Amen.

**A Time of Prayer** – *let us remember all of our brothers and sisters on the prayer list, especially those who are having a difficult time during this period of social distancing. Please share your prayer concerns so that they may be added to the prayer list by emailing your concern to Pastor Dave at dbhanks92@comcast.net or by calling him direct at 978-821-9571. He is available every evening and on weekends. During this time we suggest that you create a prayer partner with whom you can pair up until we are able to worship together at the church.*

### PRAYER LIST

Amy Belli  
Jack Brigham  
Becky Colwell  
Cathy Fontaine  
Chuck Funk  
Paula Gaudet  
Bob and Pat Goguen  
Linda Hurd  
Sarah Kee  
Kyle, a.k.a, Kippy  
Bob and Doris Lane  
Diane Lane Cormier  
Linda Long  
Lorraine Michaud  
Family of Stephen Pacheco  
Cathie Perra  
Family of Constance Pettingell  
Maria Piazza  
Melanie Pouliot  
Alex Robinson  
Del Sampson  
Elwin Shepard  
Ron Smith  
Carole Ann Sumner and Henry  
Donna Thorne  
Marilyn Wales  
Patty Westerman



All who are lonely or depressed

All who are personally dealing with the affects of the COVID-19 Virus

Those who are currently unemployed because of the virus

All medical personnel – doctors, nurses, testing staff, first responders

Those whose livelihoods have been impacted through lost jobs or  
reduced financial stability

Our government – that they may make timely and wise decisions

Our Church and all of its members

*Let us pray* .....Holy God, no day is a better reminder of our fickle nature than this Palm Sunday. One minute, we are your adoring and enthusiastic supporters waving palms and shouting praise. The next minute, we are gripped by anger. We are hurling insults. We're after blood. While we "go along to get along" and ride the rollercoaster of our emotions, you are the same yesterday, today and always. Your faithfulness is unchanging, your love unwavering. You never deviated from your purpose to rescue us from the sin that besets -- and bests -- us. You set out for Jerusalem and finished your journey even in the face of our humiliating betrayal of you. We praise you as our faithful, loving, redeeming God. Hosanna in the highest! But in all of the frenzy associated with this day we cannot lose sight of the needs of so many this day. We have been separated from one another, but we are never separated from you and your love for each of us. Be close to all this day, especially those working tirelessly to keep us all safe from the dangers of this world. Remember each of those on our prayer list and be close to them in this hour. We thank you for your mercy and grace which we experience daily. And let us now lift up our prayers as we remember the words we were taught to pray in saying,...Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

### **Benediction**

My friends, arise with joy, praising God for his gift of enduring love. Lift high the palm branches of our faith, waving them in thanksgiving for the steadfastness of a loving God who is with us always, even as we travel our own roads to Jerusalem. Amen.

# **Rollstone Congregational Church**

**United Church of Christ**

199 Main Street, Fitchburg, MA

Pastor: Rev. David B. Hanks 978-821-9571

Moderator: Paul Stansel 978-337-1608