

This is it—this is the day everyone’s been waiting for. Finally, now, Jesus is entering Jerusalem. And big things are about to happen!

Now, up to this point, Jesus’ ministry honestly hasn’t been all that impressive. So far, it’s been way out in Galilee—nowhere especially important. And while He’s done some preaching and teaching, even did some miracles—nothing’s really suggested any kind of grand destiny for Him. Neither has Jesus yet to attract much of a following—only twelve men have signed on the dotted line so far. In fact, after Jesus said some pretty weird and very challenging things, He’s even turned a lot of people off. Overall, nobody’s been terribly impressed with Jesus—at least not anything that’s really stood out.

But there was one thing Jesus said that did stand out. He said that, “One day, we shall go up to Jerusalem.” “One day, we shall make a move on that capital city—‘Jerusalem the golden,’ Jerusalem the center of national pride—one day we shall go up to Jerusalem.” And now, after much waiting, today is that day—and everyone’s excited!

At last, the people think, Jesus will pass through the gates of Jerusalem to claim His rightful place on the throne. At last, Jesus will bring about peace and prosperity again just like King David did. At last, the kingdom of God will come among us in glory. At last, Jesus will cast off the rags He’s been wearing and will adorn that royal robe—showing everyone who He really is. At last, He’ll go head to head with the powers that be.

That’s what everybody’s expecting from Him—you can find it everywhere in today’s Gospel. They anticipate Jesus to come riding into the city in this Palm Sunday parade just like their kings did—kings would come in in on some great and mighty warhorse; a big, beautiful white stallion. And when Jesus does come, the people react to Him the way they would to a Roman general—they pick up palm branches, a symbol for victory, and they fan Jesus with those palms. And there’s not a person who doesn’t shout, “Hosanna,” which is the kinda thing you’d say whenever somebody really important came to town. All eyes look to Jesus for deliverance from their oppressors and to restore their nation to greatness.

But pretty quickly, those hopes get deflated, as Jesus defies their expectations. After all, what is the first thing Jesus does? He calls over a pair of His disciples and says, “Alright boys, I want you both to go on ahead of Me, and I want you to go to the donkey rental place—see if you can get the weekend rate—and get the youngest one they have for me to ride in on.” The disciples must’ve thought, *What, a donkey—not a horse instead? And not even a full-grown one, but the foal of a donkey? Jesus, this is no way for a king to behave!* In John’s gospel, we heard that the “disciples did not understand these things at first.” The disciples, along with everyone else watching from the sidelines, were left scratching their heads. This wasn’t at all what they expected.

But a little longer, and Jesus will really throw everyone for a loop. A few days from now, the authorities will try to squash this whole Jesus Movement once and for all. And how will Jesus react—not the way anyone predicted. No, when the authorities walk up to Him—with an arrest warrant, reading Him His rights, putting Him in handcuffs—Jesus won’t so much as put up a fight; He will just go along quietly. Peter, on the one hand, will think, *Okay, this is it! Now’s the time to strike!* He’ll pull out his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. But Jesus, on the other hand, will say, “Peter, put that thing away! Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.” And much to Peter’s chagrin, Jesus will just pop that servant’s ear back on like Mr. Potato Head, and put him good as new.

Finally, as Jesus ducks His head into the backseat of the squad car, the looks on the disciples’ faces in the flashing lights will be one of utter disappointment. *That’s it, folks, nothing left to see—go to your homes.* Their expectations shattered, it’s no wonder these disciples will betray Jesus, deny Him, desert Him. And when the people’s dreams of taking back their city get dashed, today’s Palm Sunday crowd won’t be shouting “Hosanna, hosanna!” anymore, but will soon be shouting “Crucify, crucify!” come Good Friday.

Y'know, there's a familiar ring to today's Gospel story. I mean, we here in the church, are we really all that different? Have you heard the way we talk about Jesus? A lot of times it almost sounds as if what we're after is some sort of earthly king too. We're looking for Jesus to overthrow the challenges in our lives and put things as they should be for us. If we were to pay attention to our conversations, we'd hear that we talk about Jesus as if He were some kinda cure-all.

It's like the father in the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, whose solution to everything is, "Put some Windex on it." Well, around here, we might as well be saying, "Put some Jesus on it." You've got marriage problems, we say? . . . "Put some Jesus on it." You've got money troubles? . . . "Put some Jesus on it." You wanna be a better person, get your kids to behave, you're losing your hair? . . . "Put some Jesus on it." Well, maybe not that last one, but you get the picture.

People like us too often use Jesus as a miracle solvent for life's problems. In many seminaries, even future pastors oftentimes get taught to address the "felt needs" of the congregation when it comes to their preaching. After all, ask yourself what do you expect to get out of Jesus? Is He gonna make you feel better about yourself? Is He gonna help you find the right direction in your life? If you follow Him, will He make things better for you? What else is there that you expect from Jesus? And what would happen if He doesn't meet those expectations? What if you came to find out He never actually promises in the Bible what it is you're after? Would you still be all "Hosannas," or might you be the first to stir up that Good Friday crowd?

I'll never forget, it was the day I'd been waiting for. I'd been looking forward to it all year, and finally it had arrived. I'm talking about Christmas, of course, and I expected big things to happen. I had high hopes that my parents had gotten me all the things I wanted!

So, as the time came to finally tear into the presents under the tree, I grabbed the first one with my name on it. Oh boy, it's a big one—heavy too! I shook it, and it rattled. Wow, what could it be—a jet pack . . . a samurai sword . . . anti-gravity boots? I was excited about the possibilities!

Then, finally peeling away the wrapping paper, I unveiled . . . a tool set—*wah-wah*. Now I know, I know, many people—even some kids—would love to get a tool set. But with a jet pack, I could fly like a bird. And with a samurai sword, I could fight bad guy ninjas. And with anti-gravity boots, I'd be walking on air. But a tool set? To me, that felt more like work than play.

I'm thirty-four now, and guess what, I still have that tool set. It's served me well all these years—barely a week goes by that I don't use one of those wrenches, or reach for a screwdriver. Had I gotten that jet-pack though, or a samurai sword, or even anti-gravity boots, I can't guarantee I'd have much use for them today. Chances are good, I probably would've sold any of those things for next-to-nothing at a garage sale, or at best it'd be collecting dust in my attic. That tool set though, well, I'm not sure I could do without it—and I'll use it for the rest of my life. I might not have realized it at the time, but that was best gift I could've gotten. It might not have been what I wanted, but it was definitely what I needed.

That's what these folks on Palm Sunday, and all of us gathered here today, need to understand. See, the day will come when each one of us has to stand face-to-face before the Almighty God. And when we do, none of the things we want right now will matter. No, when that time comes, they won't be able to help us. But every single one of us will have to answer to God for ourselves. What we've done, what we haven't done—it'll all be on the table for God to see. And I don't know about you, but for me that's a sobering thought. In light of that, the things that were important to me no longer feel all that important anymore. All that feels important now is the one thing I do need.

And that's the Good News of Palm Sunday. The Good News of Palm Sunday is that Jesus *doesn't* come riding into Jerusalem to do battle with the Romans or the Herods like the people wanted. The Good News of Palm Sunday is that Jesus *doesn't* come to face-down our everyday problems the way we want either. If that were the case, we'd still all be in trouble someday. But the Good News of Palm Sunday is that Jesus *does* come to square off with our real trouble—the one and only thing that stands between us and a holy God, us and eternity, us and a heavenly home—Jesus comes to square off with our sin. And before the week is out, Jesus will wield the weapons of spiky thorns, and sharp nails, and piercing spear—Jesus will wage war against our enemy, sin. Sure, it will be a fight to the death, but before it's all over

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Jesus will declare, "It is finished." And this sin that stands in your way and mine will lie vanquished, and Jesus will be victorious.

That's the kind of king Jesus comes to be for us—not just the kind we have use for now, but the kind we'll need forever and ever. His coronation will include a crown of thorns. He'll be arrayed with a purple robe and hold a reed scepter. Even Gentiles, the likes of Roman soldiers, will bow down in worship before Him. And He'll take His rightful place, enthroned on a cross. Above His head, a plaque will proclaim Him, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." He might not be the king we necessarily want, but He'll be just the king we need. Jesus will be king of our salvation.

So, "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!" If that salvation is what you're now after, then your wait is over, the time has come!

See, very soon our liturgy will proclaim that it's Palm Sunday all over again. You and I will sing what's called the *Sanctus*—we'll shout, "Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" Because in Holy Communion, Jesus comes riding into Jerusalem again, this time riding into this church, what the Bible calls the *New Jerusalem*. He's not mounted humbly on the colt of a donkey, but on the lowly means of bread and wine. He comes not to triumph over our sins again—He already did that once-and-for-all—but He comes to give you a share in His victory. As you take part in the salvation of Jesus Christ by His true body and blood, you are also given a part in His rule over sin. And you can look forward to a beautiful future with our God in heaven. Funny thing how when you have a security like that, everything else in life can just seem to fall into place. He might not be everything we want in a king, but He's everything we need—Jesus, our Savior King.