

Palm Sunday from the Gospel of John

Welcoming Christ Our King

Thesis: We are a people who want to live in in such a way that we help pave the way for Christ to come as King into our lives, our families, our communities, and our world. We are a people who join Jesus on his mission in our spheres of influence together with others. So, we are a people who seek to reach others with the love of God.

Text: John 11:45 – 12:36

Sermon intro:

A lot happens this week in the life of Jesus.

The story is intense, with ebbs and flows. Then, the narrative crescendos to the point of the cross, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Led by the Holy Spirit, John focuses almost half of the Gospel of John on a period of less than 24 hours from Thursday night to Friday evening (Chapters 13 – 19).

This week, I want to encourage you to read the Scriptures from the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem to the resurrection of Jesus. Next Sunday, we focus together on the resurrection of Jesus.

In the Scripture readings this week, you will read about the Passover Meal which the Lord Jesus shared with his disciples. Jesus reinterprets it and gives us the Lord's Supper. We encounter Jesus at his Communion Table to remember all that he has done for us, all that he is doing, and all that he will do.

By celebrating the Lord's Supper, (1) we remember the Lord Jesus and his sacrifice, (2) we proclaim his gospel, and (2) we prophesy his return (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

On Thursday evening of Passion Week, I invite you do something special. Spend time with the Lord as an individual or as a family around the Lord's table.

1. First, I invite you to go your own pantry and get some crackers or bread, and some juice. You can use whatever you have. It doesn't need to be a certain type of bread or cracker in order to be holy. It is all about God's love shown through the cross of Jesus that makes it sacred.

2. Next, pray and ask the Lord to help you meet him at his table. Pray and sanctify the bread and the juice and your time with the Lord and each other.
3. Read one or more of the Scripture passages detailing the meal Jesus shared with his disciples (Matthew 26:14-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:1-39; John 13:1-38).
4. As an addendum to my sermon notes, I have included a commentary from NT Wright on the Lord's Supper. Read that selection prayerfully. (See the addendum to my sermon notes.)
5. As you engage in Communion, I suggest reading 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Worship the Lord Jesus. Declare your love for him. As needed, take time to confess any sins, anything which the Holy Spirit brings to your attention. Then, turn back to the Lord, receiving his forgiveness.
6. Take the bread or cracker and give thanks for his body broken for you and your salvation and healing. Partake of the bread.
7. Next, take the cup. Give thanks for his shed blood that cleanses us of all sin and establishes a new covenant. Declare that the blood of Jesus takes away the sin of the whole world. Partake of the juice.
8. Close in prayer.

By engaging in these spiritual practices of reading the Scripture, praying, and celebrating the Lord's Supper, we are taking the time to slow down, to focus on the Lord Jesus, and to spend time with our God.

Setting the stage

John 11:45–57 (NIV84) 45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” 49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! 50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” 51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God,

to bring them together and make them one. 53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life. 54 Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples. 55 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. 56 They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, "What do you think? Isn't he coming to the Feast at all?" 57 **But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.**

1. The context of John 11 is Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Because of this miracle (or sign in John's gospel), many Jews put their faith in Jesus (:45).
2. Other Jews reported to the Pharisees (:46).
3. The chief priest and Pharisees convened a meeting of the Sanhedrin (:47) to figure out what to do about Jesus and his threat against their power and status (:48).
4. In that context, High Priest Caiaphas made a statement that John understands to be a prophetic word (:49-52).
5. The end result of this meeting of the Sanhedrin was a plot to kill Jesus (:53).
6. During the time prior to Passover week, many people looked for Jesus, wondering where he was (:54-56).
7. The religious leaders were looking for him too, so that they might arrest him and carry out their plot (:57).

Anointed for his burial

John 12:1–11 (NIV84) 1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." 6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. 7 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." 9 Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10 So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, 11 for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

1. It is six days before Passover (:1).
2. Jesus goes to Bethany to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (:1-2).
3. Martha served. Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Jesus (:2).
4. **Mary anoints Jesus for his burial** (:3-8). Judas Iscariot criticizes the "waste." Jesus rebukes Judas. Jesus honors, receives, and exonerates Mary's act of devotion.
5. A large crowd of Jews came to the house to see Jesus and Lazarus, because Jesus had raised him from the dead (:9).
6. Now, the chief priests added Lazarus to their hit list because "of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him" (:10-11).

The Triumphal Entry: welcoming Christ our King.

*John 12:12–19 (NIV84) 12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. 13 They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!" 14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, 15 "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." 16 At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him. 17 Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. 18 Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him. 19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "**See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!**"*

What does it all mean?

John 12:20–36 (NIV84) 20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." 22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. 23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. 27 "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have

glorified it, and will glorify it again.” 29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. 30 Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. 34 The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?” 35 Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. 36 Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

1. Jesus responds to Greek speaking people coming to see him (:20-24).
 - a. At that point Jesus declares that, if he is ‘lifted up’ from the earth, he will draw all people to himself. In other words, if the Greeks want to see him, want to benefit fully from what he’s been sent into the world to do, his proper response is to carry on and complete the work the father has given him. Only by this strange vocation will the non-Jewish world, the world of ‘Greeks’ (much of the known world spoke Greek, so that was a good way of referring to them), come to gain the truest and deepest access to him that God intended. They wouldn’t just ‘see’ him, as they’d asked; they would ‘come to’ him, in the sense of being drawn by the powerful love of God, drawn into fellowship and new life (NT Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21*).
2. Jesus declares that the way to gain life is to surrender and to follow him (:25-26). **If we try to hold onto our life or save our own life, we lose it.**
3. Jesus declares that his time has come (:27).
 - a. The time when the preparation has been completed, and the great event, the final moment of love and liberation, has to take place (John 12:27) (NT Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21*).
4. Jesus knew that his remaining time was short (:23-33).
5. Jesus knew that what the people expected of Messiah and what was he was all about were clearly two different things (:34).
6. Jesus knew the sacrifice and cost which he was making (:27).
7. Jesus knew the cost of rejecting him and his kingdom, both then and now (:25). They did not recognize their day of visitation nor what would have brought them peace. (See Luke 19:41-44.)
 - a. Because they rejected Jesus and his invitation to live a different way, in 70 AD, their ways resulted in Jerusalem being destroyed and the Jews being scattered in diaspora among the nations for almost two thousand years.

8. Jesus invites you and me to lay down our lives and to follow him in a personal, dynamic relationship (:23-26).
 - a. *Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me (John 12:23-26 NIV).*
9. Jesus knew that as he is lifted up, he would make a way for all people to have relationship with the Living God (:27-36).

[Jesus prays:] 'Father, glorify your name!'

That is the prayer that gets answered by thunder. God has glorified his name—he's done so already, in Jesus' extraordinary public career, in his mighty and loving works. And he will do so again. Be obedient, follow the way and watch.

He will glorify his name: because those who have usurped God's rule in the world, those who have laid it waste and trampled on the poor and exalted themselves as kings, lords and even as gods—all of them are now going to be condemned. 'Now is the judgment of this world! Now the world's ruler is going to be thrown out!' But it won't look like that. This was the language lots of people were expecting. It was the sort of talk you would associate with a would-be Messiah. The next thing you knew, he'd be telling you to sharpen your sword and help him attack the Roman garrison beside the Temple.

But Jesus wasn't that sort of Messiah. He was aiming to overthrow the kingdom of the world, all right, and replace it with the kingdom of God. But the victory was to be of a totally different sort. It was all about his being 'lifted up', exalted—on a pole, like the serpent in the wilderness (3:14-15). That's how the world would be rescued. That's how God, the true God, the God of astonishing, generous love, would be glorified. Swords don't glorify the creator-God. Love does. Self-giving love, best of all. (NT Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11-21*).

Seeking His VISITATION: Welcoming Christ our King

From: *Seek God for the City 2020* (Waymakers.org)

The importance of Palm Sunday

The event we have come to call “Palm Sunday” shines as a prophetic portrait of the spiritual awakening Christ desires to bring. Jesus not only initiated the procession, but He refused to shut it down. He was doing more than merely fulfilling prophecy. He was prophesying, presenting a lasting vision of how He will be recognized in the midst of hostility at the end of the age. Christ will be followed by some in every people. He will be welcomed, at least by a few, in every place. Palm Sunday gives us a vision of the global spiritual awakening we are praying toward.

Preparing the way by prayer

Jesus prepared the way for Palm Sunday by sending His followers to pray on-site in many communities (Luke 10:1-2). The prayers of these ordinary followers were publicly prayed and then openly answered. God was being honored. Jesus was becoming famous in places where He had not yet personally visited. The expectancy of what God would do was great.

A crescendo of welcoming praise

The raising of Lazarus touched off an explosion of welcoming praise (John 12:18). The dramatic answer to Jesus’ prayer for His friend Lazarus (John 11:41-43) got everyone talking about all they had seen God do in the lives of their friends and neighbors. Luke says the crowd was praising God “for all the miracles which they had seen” (Luke 19:37). Grateful praise for many answered prayers quickly became a crescendo of welcoming worship.

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Palm Sunday: the hope of Christ's visitation

A lasting movement

Thousands of people gathered at the temple with Jesus early every morning, hanging on His every word (Luke 21:38). The Palm Sunday worshipers should not be confused with the much smaller mob which shouted for Jesus’ execution later in the week. That crowd

was incited by Christ's enemies, who were forced to arrest Jesus by night "because they were afraid of the people" — the very throng that had welcomed and honored Him daily with increasing devotion (Luke 22:2, Mark 14:1-2).

A prophetic portrait

Palm Sunday is sometimes dismissed as if it were a political rally gone wrong. But Jesus was all for it. He planned whatever could have been planned. And He refused to silence the celebration. He said that rocks would have cried out if the people had been restrained (Luke 19:40). The intensity mounted. The crowds increased. Eventually "all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this?'" (Matthew 21:10). Those who hadn't yet personally encountered Jesus were eager to know more. If Jesus was giving us any indication of how God desires to visit communities with transforming power, we are right in praying for such receptive glory to sweep throughout whole cities.

The hope of visitation: His arrival more than our revival

Hated or praised, Christ was then what He will be again: the sole focus of attention of whole cities in days of great spiritual awakening. Our best prayers are prayers of welcome — that the risen Jesus Himself will be recognized and received throughout entire communities. Whenever there has been revival, it has been a partial fulfillment of the promise of Palm Sunday. Now, more than ever, it's time to invite Christ the Lord to bring His life-giving presence upon our cities.

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Seeking the VISITATION of CHRIST the KING

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. — Psalm 118:26

On Palm Sunday, Jesus was rejected by a few, which caused Him to weep. But He was also welcomed by many.

Day after day people thronged to Him and His teaching, celebrating the wonders of the coming kingdom. Palm Sunday may be the clearest picture we have of how God visits an entire community with His transforming power. Today we celebrate the hope that God will visit His people throughout the world to glorify Himself before the end of the age.

Psalm 24:1; 7-10 (NIV84) 1 The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.... 7 Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. 8 Who is this King of glory?

The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. 9 Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. 10 Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty— he is the King of glory.

Application:

1. Let us welcome Jesus into our hearts and lives.
2. Let us live as agents of the kingdom of God, sharing the love of God and the way of Jesus with others.
3. Let us welcome Jesus into our communities and our cities.

“Now, more than ever, it’s time to invite Christ the Lord to bring His life-giving presence upon our cities [and our lives]” (*Seek God for the City 2020*, [Waymakers](#)).

Addendum: The Lord's Supper

NT Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapter 16-28* (Matthew 26:26-35)

The cockcrow, and Peter's denial, are all the more poignant because of what has just happened. Though the disciples probably didn't understand it much at the time—it was all too bewildering and unexpected—the meal they shared with Jesus has echoed down the centuries like that insistent cockcrow, reminding us not just of our own failings (though it may do that as well) but of Jesus' coming to meet us, failing as we were, and inviting us to a banquet in which his own self was the food and drink. This is such a strange, and even repellent, idea, that we have to take a couple of steps back from it and approach it with care.

As far as the disciples were concerned, this was a Passover meal. That's what they had prepared. To this day, when Jewish families all over the world celebrate Passover, there is special food and drink, prescribed by custom going back thousands of years. And there are particular words to say.

The words tell the story of how God's people, Israel, came out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, leaving behind their slavery and going on to freedom in their promised land. The food and drink are carefully chosen to symbolize and express aspects of that great event, the Exodus. Thus, for instance, there are bitter herbs, which symbolize the hardships the Israelites suffered in Egypt. The head of the household must say the words, introducing the different parts of the meal.

All this, which is so strange to many in the modern world, would have been second nature to the disciples. They would of course have been expecting Jesus to take the part of the leader in this regular, annual celebration of God's promised freedom.

And so he did. But, in doing so, he drew the meaning of the whole meal on to himself. He offered a new direction of thought which, for those who followed him and came to believe in him, took Passover in quite a new direction, which has likewise continued to this day. We can perhaps imagine the shock of the disciples as they realized he was departing from the normal script and talking about... himself.

'My body, my very self... here it is!'

'My blood, my life, my death, all for you, all so that sins can be forgiven... here it is!'

Look around the room in your mind's eye and see the reaction. Peter, furious that Jesus is still talking about dying, and on such a special evening as well. Thomas, giving a little shake of the head. He'd not understood more than a third of what had gone before, and

he doesn't understand this at all. John (if indeed it is John, reclining close to Jesus) looking up in astonishment, in a mixture of love and fear. Judas (Matthew implies that he's still here at this point) frozen in his place, wondering how much Jesus knows and how much he's guessed.

And you? What is your reaction to this extraordinary performance?

For many Christians, the regular celebration in which we copy Jesus, remembering that Last Supper and repeating its action in order to go back in heart and mind to the original setting, and nourish ourselves once more with the death and life and presence and personality of Jesus—for many of us, this is a central part of our story. We couldn't do without it. But for other Christians, it has remained a puzzle, a bit threatening, perhaps. It's been so overlaid with different meanings, and seems to have caused so many squabbles, that people are almost shy about it.

The heart of the matter is reasonably straightforward, though none the less breathtaking. Jesus was drawing into one event a millennium and more of Jewish celebrations. The Jews had believed for some while that the original Exodus pointed on to a new one, in which God would do at last what he had long promised: he would forgive the sins of Israel and the world, once and for all. Sin, a far greater slave-master than Egypt had ever been, would be defeated in the way God defeated not only Egypt but also the Red Sea. And now Jesus, sitting there at a secret meal in Jerusalem, was saying, by what he was doing as much as by the words he was speaking: this is the moment. This is the time. And it's all because of what's going to happen to me.

Jesus' action at the Last Supper was, you see, the equivalent in symbolic language (and symbols are the most powerful form of communication) of those sayings about the son of man being handed over, and giving his life as a ransom for many (20:28). Somehow, identifying the bread and the wine with his body (about to be broken in death) and his blood (about to be spilt on the cross), and inviting his followers to share it and find in it the gift of forgiveness of sins, of new life, of God's kingdom—somehow this action had then, and still has today, a power beyond words. A power to touch and heal parts of our broken and messy lives. A power to tell the world around that Jesus is Lord (see 1 Corinthians 11:26).

But, perhaps because that power always remains mysterious, and never in our own control, many people found then and find still that it's all too much. The disciples, instead of being heartened and encouraged, were all about to be scattered, as Jesus went alone to face the darkest night of the world. Peter, big, strong, blustering Peter, was about to be reduced to a spluttering, lying, weeping fool. Perhaps that tells us something, too, about the power of Jesus' action. Perhaps when it starts to have its effect the first sign is that we learn just how weak and needy we are. Perhaps the

combination of Last Supper and cockcrow will always haunt us, always challenge us, always lay bare our continuing need for God's redeeming love, until the new day dawns and Jesus shares with us the new wine of the kingdom of God (NT Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapter 16-28*).