

March 29, 2026 – Palm Sunday

Everyone Loves a Parade

Mark 11:1-11

For some reason, whenever I go to a parade, I cry. When I watch a parade on television ... I cry. Watching the Thanksgiving parade this year, I really cried – but I probably wasn't the only one.

I remember when Toby and I were dating, he would often take me to Andover to visit his family and that has continued throughout our marriage. We used to go frequently, but the two biggest events were always the Maple Festival – which was traditionally Palm Sunday weekend ... so for many years we missed our Palm Sunday service here in Niagara Falls; and then there was the Fourth of July. Everyone throughout the county and further out would come to tiny Andover for the celebration, which included a huge event on the school grounds and fireworks in the evening.

The day always started with a parade down Main Street. Like any parade, there were floats and marching bands. There was always a huge contingency of Vietnam (and I think other) veterans on motorcycles.

There were pageant princesses, the Shriners Cart Corp, candy being thrown to the kids. And every year I cried. I think I really confused Toby that first year!

I don't know why I cry at parades, but it never fails. Maybe it's because everyone is so happy. People are proud to see their friends and family marching, playing an instrument, throwing a baton high in the air, driving their antique cars, waving to the crowd. Kids are excited to see everything going on.

We're proud to see the flag being carried down the street. We love to see the dancers, the jugglers, banners on flag poles along the route, the floats that groups took hours to decorate, the riders on horseback, the firetrucks with their sirens and lights, to see everyone smiling. We're connected to everyone around us. We realize we're a community.

It gets really emotional! The saying goes – Everyone loves a parade! ... Well, maybe not everyone, but a lot of us sure do!

Today we hear about another parade ... Jesus triumphantly entering Jerusalem, upon the back of a colt – the beginning of what we now know as Holy Week. But this isn't just any parade because at the end of this one, Jesus fulfills prophecy and goes to the temple just as Malachi promised ... Malachi 3:1 says, "... *and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple.*"

As Jesus rides into Jerusalem, some people spread their cloaks on the road and others take leafy branches and spread them out for the colt to walk on. It's a celebration for those who believe Jesus has come to save them from their oppression. This is their Messiah and they believed that He was going to take the throne of David and free them from the Romans, that Jesus would start a revolution! They were claiming victory before the battle had even begun!

Scripture says that the crowd cried out, "*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!*"

The shouts of "Hosanna" were both words of praise as well as a prayer. The crowd was truly crying out "Save us, please! Rescue us now!" In Psalm 118:25 we hear the same words, "*Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!*"

Hosanna – "God save us!" The crowd has misunderstood what Jesus has come to do. He rides in on a peaceful colt; no saddle, just a cloak across the colt's back. His feet may even be touching the ground.

Zechariah 9:9 says, "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*" - rather than on a majestic white stallion who represents being ready for battle. Jesus' disciples don't get it, the crowds don't get it.

During this week, if we were to follow Jesus' procession, His parade, we would be a part of the shouts of celebration, of joy.

Following the procession would call us to join Jesus in the upper room as He talks about betrayal and denial; as He breaks bread with His apostles. We would see Jesus as he enters the garden to pray to His Father; we would see Him

arrested; we would follow Him as He is brought to trial and the shouts of “Hosanna” change to shouts of “Crucify Him!”

We would see how the parade changes from a celebration to a funeral march to the cross. No shouts of “Hosanna!” No cheering. We would experience a great conflict of emotions as the crowds watch Jesus pass, exhausted, painfully dragging the cross to which He’ll eventually be nailed.

If we faithfully follow Jesus throughout this week, if we choose to follow Him rather than to take the easy route; if we follow Him and admit where we have betrayed Him – we would see His great love for us.

Would it be easier to go from the celebratory entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem to Easter morning – skipping all the emotions between those two days? Is it easier to wave our palm branches today and then show up next Sunday in our Easter best to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection – skipping the quiet service of Maundy Thursday and the great weight on Jesus’ shoulders that night, the betrayal, the fear of His followers, the loneliness; skipping our Good Friday meditation – remembering how Jesus was whipped, how His mother’s heart broke; the words Jesus spoke from the cross, how He suffered and died for us?

Palm Sunday reminds us that despair and hope both travelled on that parade route. The people misunderstood the reason for Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. Because we are able to see how what they wanted and what God’s true intention was didn’t match – we are more able to let God decide on the purpose of the parade we follow.

But it’s still not easy. We want our friends and family to have good health, jobs, a roof over their heads, peace. We want an end to racism, to discrimination, to hunger, to fear, to cruelty. We want the world to be a perfect place and we want God to make it so ... now. This is what those who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem wanted, too.

If we decide to follow the parade, we make our way behind Jesus, and we will see a world where pain and praise; suffering and salvation; despair and hope co-exist along the route. We have faith that Jesus’ ride upon that colt ultimately brings the change that we hope for – teaching us to serve as He served, to love as He loved; allowing us to be free from the things of this world that contain us, control us – free from greed, evil, indifference and selfishness; free from self-hatred and fear; free to be everything God knows we can be, what we are called to be – free to be radically changed, free to follow Jesus’ command to love others as Jesus has loved us – to die to self and live for God and others, making a positive change in this world.

Even if though it makes me cry, I love a parade and I’m deciding to follow Jesus’ parade, shouting out “Hosanna! Lord, save me! Change me!”