

Palm Sunday

Lived in Faith: Covenant Confirmed

Week 6 Beyond

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

I love Palm Sunday in general, I love palms, I they're green and they're leafy, like two of my favorite things ever. I on the back of your seats, there is a card that you'll be invited to bring up later on in the service, and it has a little tiny palm branch on the very top of the corner.

It's not quite the same as actually having a palm branch to wave. If I ask you to wave those cards, it just wouldn't quite be the same thing. I'm also going to need something. I. I'm always a little bit sad when the palm branches get taken away from the kids so quickly here. When my kids were growing up, the, the kids ministry leaders, they let those kids keep those palm branches the whole time they were singing.

And it was chaos. You know, I, I really respect our team, the staff and the volunteers of our kids. Men, they want success for our kids. And, I really respect that, because, you know what happens when you give kids these long, leafy, stick like things, right? You get Jedi moves and sword fights and baton twirling, and someone is getting their eye poked.

It's wild, it's unpredictable. And honestly, it's kind of fitting because the original palm Sunday itself was chaotic. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and people were shouting, they were waving palm branches. They were taking off their cloaks and laying it on onto the ground. It wasn't this dignified royal procession. It was a spontaneous, joy filled, messy celebration.

Kind of like thing. And just like the kids today up here on stage, the crowd back then, they probably sensed something big was happening, but they just didn't understand quite how big. Now, one of my favorite chaotic crowd stories happened in 2021. A guy named Josh Swain from Arizona jokingly messenger messaged a bunch of other Josh Swains on social media.

Now this is April of 2020, right? April of 2020. What else do you do but message a bunch of other people with your same name for a battle of the name? So here's how this group chat wins. Original. Josh, you're probably wondering why I've gathered you all here today. Another Josh because we all share the same name. Original Josh.

Josh precisely for 24, 2021 at 12:00 PM, meet at these coordinates listed coordinates. We fight. Whoever wins gets to keep the name. Everyone else has to change their name. You have one year to prepare. Good luck. So Josh in Arizona sets up a time one year in advance. Gives coordinates for Lincoln, Nebraska because he's like, that's the center of the country.

And what started out as a meme, what started out as a joke turned into a full on event that happened here in Lincoln, Nebraska, near Airpark. So hundreds of people named Josh showed up for this event. Many more who didn't weren't named Josh, but they just wanted to watch the madness they gathered in this field with pool noodles, and they battled, they some of the more superhero costumes.

And they crowned a four year old named Little Josh as the ultimate victor of this battle. So the story goes, it was total chaos, but totally beautiful. People showed up just to be a part of something fun and joyful, something that brought connection even if it didn't make perfect sense. So that day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey was kind of like that.

The people didn't fully grasp what was what they were showing up for, but they knew that it mattered. They wanted to be a part of something bigger than themselves. So let's hear the story from Scripture. If you're following along on the YouVersion Bible app, we always list the scripture I'm actually going to read from Matthew instead of Luke.

So here's Matthew's version, found in Matthew chapter 21, when they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. He said to them, go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me.

If anyone says anything to you, say that their master needs them. He sent them off right away. Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said. Say to daughter Zion, look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey and on a colt. The donkey's offspring, the disciples went and did just as Jesus had ordered them.

They brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them. Then Jesus sat on them. Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest! And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. Who is this? They asked. The crowds answered. It's the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee. Jesus riding a donkey wasn't just a practical choice, it was symbolic. While a horse or a war horse signified power and conquest, a donkey represented peace and humility. There is a story about Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth the First, and the story goes that they're walking around London and it's a muddy day, and they come to this path on the road, and it's just so muddy where Sir Walter, he takes off his cloak and he lays it on the ground.

So that's, Queen Elizabeth the First. Couldn't wouldn't get her shoes muddy. And there's something about that symbol of taking off your cloak, maybe your only cloak. You think

about the crowd in Jerusalem. They probably didn't have a lot of other cloaks back home, but they spread them out anyway. So Jesus is riding in. He's making this statement.

He's saying, of peace and humility. He's saying that the kingdom that I'm bringing in is not like the other kingdoms. It was also a clear statement that that he was the Messiah, God's anointed one. But he's coming in peace and humility. And yet the people still rolled out the red carpet, literally laying down their cloaks and waving branches and shouting praises.

We know what happens when a crowd grows too loud. We know what happens when a crowd grows too hopeful or two disruptive big crowds attract attention and sometimes big crowds, create some resistance. Martin Luther King Jr knew that. Nelson Mandela knew that, as one Bible commentator put it, fighting for freedom is a dangerous endeavor. Jesus knew it too.

Yet he still entered Jerusalem knowing what was coming. Because there is power. When people come together, especially when they gather for justice or for peace or for hope. Some people don't like that. So that's what we're doing when we gather for our Nehemiah action that happens on May 1st here in this city, and it's going to be held at Saint Mark's United Methodist Church.

It is the third time for this cycle that we have this Nehemiah action. Where we gather there's almost 30 different. So faith organizations and all of the people gathered together, it's a crowd. And maybe you have never maybe you have never gone to anything like this before. Well, here is your opportunity. Here's your invitation to show up.

We're gathering at this Nehemiah action with one voice. We and what this one voice is saying. We want more for our neighbors. We want more for those who are in mental health crisis. We want more. For those who are living without housing, we we want more for those nonviolent offenders sitting in jail waiting for trial. Now, another opportunity to show up is tomorrow.

It's the Monday of Holy Week. And these churches, we are going to gather outside the city county building at 1130. And we want to say to our community that people of faith are stepping up for injustices in our neighborhoods. We want to come with peace and humility, to be a crowd that shows up. Now, if you plan to come tomorrow, or if you just want to support in another way.

We have these strips of paper out in the atrium, and you can write your name on it as a, as a way of support. And we're going to add our strips with all of the other churches and make a statement, a peaceful statement. You can find out more information about all of this in the atrium. There'll be people out there to tell you more biblical scholars.

The text itself shows that that Jesus, strategically, through his actions, planned this event. He arranged with the donkey's owners. He knew that this crowd would gather, for even though he knew that there was a price on his head, he could have slipped into Jerusalem. Hidden away someplace, quietly just hiding. But he didn't. He put a spotlight on himself.

It was a bold act of faith. Palm Sunday reminds us that crowds can be chaotic. But they can also be a catalyst for change. Then is the crowd surrounded? Jesus, the. The people shouted Hosanna! Which means please save us. Please save us! This is what they were shouting. Now we often confuse Hosanna and Hallelujah. We interchange those.

Hallelujah, though, is a praise, praise the Lord kind of sentiment is a shout of thanksgiving in traditional churches during lent. You don't say hallelujah, right? Not in song or scripture. You avoid that word to be reminded of what we as individuals and as the collective people need saving from Hosanna. Please save us Jesus. That is what we are shouting today.

The people in Jerusalem that day thought that Jesus was coming to overthrow Rome, right? That is their. They're shouting please save us, please come overthrow Rome. But Jesus came to overthrow something even bigger than that sin, fear and death itself. His kingdom wasn't about power. It was about peace. A new kind of covenant that God was making with God's people.

And we were. If you remember back to when we began lent, the very first week of of lent, we talked about renewing our covenant with God and God's new covenant. So we'll go back to Jeremiah chapter 31 and read it again at that time, declares the Lord. I don't think that's right. Okay. He'll start over. The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah.

It won't be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant with me even though I was their husband, declares the Lord. No, this is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel. After that time, declares the Lord, I will put my instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people. They will no longer need to teach each other to say, know the Lord because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive them their wrongdoings and never again remember their sins. This covenant, this new covenant, is not written on stone tablets to be broken.

It's it's actually written on our hearts. It's not about rules. It's about relationship. It's about showing up because of what God has done. And just like the very first palm Sunday, when people laid down their cloaks and waved their branches, we are invited to lay something

down to and not just as a symbolic act, but as a tangible response of what God is doing among us.

The crowd didn't fully understand the kind of kingdom that Jesus was ushering in. They had hope, but they didn't understand. And yet they still showed up. They still shouted Hosanna! They offered what they had. And today we get the chance to do the same thing. As we continue to follow Jesus on his journey toward the cross and beyond, we are invited to go beyond what's comfortable.

We're invited to go beyond what we think is possible, beyond ourselves, and actually into our community. And in a moment, you're are going to be invited to bring up your commitment card, your beyond commitment card. And maybe you brought it with you and filled it out. Or there's extra on the back of your seats that you can fill out.

And I want to say that this beyond campaign that we've been, talking about, this is more than just a campaign for money. It's a covenant that horizons is making with God as we continue the ministry of sharing the love of Jesus with others. It's a step of faith toward the future that God is building here through us, on the backs of your seats.

If you want to grab one of those cards, or if you didn't bring one, you can look at that card. And if you're a guest here, if this is your first time and you're like, I have no idea about this beyond campaign, and if you still want to participate there, there's a line. There's a box that you can check that says, I am a guest, but I'll commit to praying for whatever is happening here.

And we invite you to fill that out. Whether you've completed your card online, there's a check box for that as well. If you're unable to get up or uncomfortable with that, to get up, that's okay too. Then after a prayer, we'll invite you to come forward and bring your beyond commitment card to the altar, and we'll lay down our cards.

We'll bring what we have, whether that be our prayers or our commitments or our renewal of our covenant with God. And like that crowd that was gathered in Jerusalem, your presence here matters. Your part in this journey matter. So let this be your moment, your way of saying, I want to be a part of what God is doing.

I want to catch the wind of the Spirit of God right here, right now. So as the band plays, as we reflect and we pray, you're invited to come forward, you're invited to come forward in a time of prayer. And you can wave your palm branch if you want, on your way down. But I invite you to bring your heart.

I invite you to bring your hope for a future kingdom of peace and love. Let us pray.

Lord God, with Palm Sunday, you invite us into the chaos. You invite us into the celebration. You invite us into the tension and into the hope. Palm Sunday reminds us that Jesus did come to save, but not always in the way that we expect. So God, may we wave our palm branches not in confusion, but in confidence. May we show up, not because we have it all figured out, but because we want to be a part of something bigger.

God, may we cry Hosanna and trust that you hear us, and that indeed you have saved us. And we say this in Jesus's name, Amen.