“Through Jesus’ Eyes1”

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Psalm 118:1-2,19-29; Luke 19:28-40

April 13, 2025 – Palm Sunday

***Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29***

***O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  his steadfast love endures forever!***

***2Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” Open to me the gates of righteousness,  that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.***

***20This is the gate of the Lord;  the righteous shall enter through it.***

***21I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.  
22The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.  
23This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.  
24This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.  
25Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!***

***26******Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.  
27The Lord is God, and he has given us light.*** ***Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.***

***28You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;  you are my God; I will extol you.***

***29O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.***

***Luke 19:28-40***

***After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.***

***29When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’ ” 32So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37Now as he was approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38saying,***

***“Blessed is the king  
    who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven,  
    and glory in the highest heaven!”***

***39Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”***

How often do we remember a story, only to realize that we got it mostly wrong? Sometimes what we are remembering is a story from memory, combined with that same story told by others. I remember mentioning once that I was mildly surprised when I discovered that the Biblical Christmas story does not include elves or candy canes.

What we are remembering as we wave these palms today, and shout hosanna, is a collection of memories as told by *all* of the gospel writers. In John, there are no instructions about how to get the colt/donkey, and no cloaks. In Matthew and Mark there are palms or cut branches, a colt or a donkey, and hosannas and cloaks. In Luke 19, today’s text, however, there are no palms. There are no hosannas. There are only cloaks and a colt. If the gospel of Luke were all we had, today might be Cloak Sunday. “What ties Luke’s account together with the entry narratives of Matthew, Mark, and John [besides the colt] is a shared citation of Psalm 118:26—”2 ***Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.*** This is part of the reason this Psalm was paired with this Luke text. Also notable, is Psalm 118:27, “***Bind the festal procession with branches,”*** which adds to our image and memories of waving palms.

It's common to enter church on palm Sunday in a procession, shouting hosanna, waving palms – but I used to think that was because we, the modern non-1st century folks, were excited about the Jesus *we* know, who sent death packing, who cleansed us of all of our sins, who loves us unconditionally and forever, marching at the head of the parade. Our palms waving, along with Jesus celebrating as if Jesus was having a triumphal entry right into our own sanctuary.

No doubt, those in the crowd who had been paying attention – notice the crowd is made up of disciples; it’s not a crowd of the 12 we think of; it’s a crowd of people who have been learning, following, curious about, and now believing in the purpose and promises of the man Jesus. “The whole multitude of disciples” says verse 37. No doubt, that multitude was celebrating in real time the things Jesus had promised – mostly the promise that the last would be first and the first would be last and the powerful would tumble and the meek would rise. Their celebration in real time would have been different than our celebration. More than 2000 years of a human created although divinely inspired yet broken institution have left us with our recreation of this palm parade that reminds us of those who first followed Jesus.

Often we read text and are asked or we just imagine ourselves in the scene somewhere. We might be in the crowd. We might be one of the Pharisees – in this scene, some Pharisees were ones who maybe weren’t totally against Jesus, but were part of a system that was such a part of who they were, they just didn’t want the disruption and angst of a big change. Maybe we gave up our cloak to spread on the ground in front of Jesus on the colt. Maybe we were on the next block and heard all the commotion and wondered what was going on.

One commentator though, challenged me to look at the scene through Jesus’ eyes. I can honestly say that I have never imagined myself as Jesus, in any scene, ever. This commentator gave me pause as he suggested some viewpoints.1 He points out that the text for today is (quote) “bracketed by some dark events: ominous words in Luke 19:26-27 [the end of a parable that talks about killing my enemies here in front of me] and outright weeping on Jesus’ part in Luke 19:41-44 [Jesus looks out over Jerusalem].” The commentator asks, “So as Jesus allowed the Triumphal Entry little parade to continue, did his eyes betray the real truth?  Did he smile as he received the “Blessed is the king . . .” accolades but even so displayed a very deep sorrow in his eyes?

Next time we meet here in Sunday worship, we will be shouting “He is Risen!” But before then, much will have happened. All four of the gospel writers include at least five more long chapters before they reach the point of Jesus’ resurrection. What could possibly be happening in all of those chapters? It’s like watching a scary movie in slow motion. The extended parables, answering even more questions from disciples, the authorities moving ever closer to an actual arrest of Jesus; the bribe to Judas Iscariot to lead them to Jesus’ location; the humiliating arrest, the mock trial, the shouting of “crucify him!” and the actual death of our Lord, on a cross, between two thieves – even they knew that Jesus was the Lord, and asked that they be remembered as Jesus went into the kingdom. Only then, after so much drama and sorrow will we arrive in church on Sunday morning. We will arrive, not with happy shouts because all is well. We will arrive with happy shouts because even as we wave our palm branches today we see through them to the actual cost of our shouts of Easter joy. We wave them joyfully today because we know, what even Jesus knew then – you could have seen it in his eyes. This was a triumphal entry – for us. But it was not triumphal then. Who but Jesus actually knew how tragic things would go that week? And who but the multitude of disciples would have stood by and said I know it looks bad, but surely *that* won’t happen. Or *that*. Or *that*.

But it did. So we wave our palms, perhaps re-writing the Psalm for today, writing:

***This [Jesus] is the gate of the Lord;  the righteous shall enter through it.***

***21I thank you [Jesus] that you have answered me and have become my salvation.  
22The stone that the builders rejected [Jesus] has become the chief cornerstone.  
23This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.  
24This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.***

Let’s pray,

1Hoezee, Scott; 2019 commentary, <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2019-04-08/luke-1928-40-2/>

2Working Preacher, Jerusha Matsen Neal, 4/13/2025

3<https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-04-07/luke-1928-40-4/>

Harmon, Chelsey, March 2025