

Palm Sunday Sermon
The Rev. Megan Dembi

With Easter being only a week away, it can be tempting for us to begin to get ahead of ourselves a bit, and to forget that Lent is not yet over. Today is Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week, the last week that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ walked on this earth in his mortal body. And to mentally skip over this week would be doing a great disservice to our faith. Because hearing the story of the resurrection without hearing the events that came before it minimizes the significance of the resurrection. As we spoke about last week when we heard the story of Christ raising Lazarus from the dead, Christ's resurrection was unlike any of the resurrection miracles performed by himself or his disciples. Yet without Holy Week, Christ being raised from the dead on Easter can become to us just another miraculous event, not truly different than any of the other miracles we read about in scripture. Holy Week gives us the opportunity to put the events of the resurrection into a larger context of our faith. And this begins with the events that occurred on what we now call Palm Sunday, the Sunday nearly 2000 years ago when Christ entered into Jerusalem met by crowds throwing palms along his path and shouting "Hosanna! Save us!" And Christ, did in fact enter into Jerusalem in order to save these people—and not just these people shouting in the crowds, but all people, and the entire world. Though Jesus had warned his disciples of this, the crowds would not have known that Christ entered into Jerusalem knowing he would soon be killed, and that it would be by his death that salvation would be offered to all. Christ willingly entered into the city in which he knew he would be put to death in order to put into motion God's plan of salvation. This fate was not inflicted on him from by God, because Christ himself was God the Son incarnate, and God the Son, God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit were all at work in this plan. Christ did not enter into Jerusalem thinking he would die because of religious persecution or political injustice, but to fulfill the mysterious and miraculous plan for salvation that the One Triune God had created.

And yes, Palm Sunday has evolved so that the entire story of Holy Week is briefly told, so that those who do not or cannot attend Holy Week services do not celebrate the glorious resurrection at Easter after only having heard of Christ's triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. But the main point that we should take away from Palm Sunday, this first day in Holy Week, is this—the very same people who joyfully greeted Christ as he entered into Jerusalem would, in just a few days on Good Friday, fervently shout for Christ to be condemned to death. Palm Sunday reminds us that Christ came into Jerusalem willingly to meet his fate in order for God's plan for salvation to be fulfilled, but it also reminds us that Christ was betrayed by his own followers—condemned to death by the very people he came to save. And though we ourselves were not physically present during these events, Palm Sunday reminds us that we, too, are complicit in the events that led to Christ's death. If we were able to overcome our sinful desires and follow God's commands we would not need a savior. Yet there is not one of us who is righteous, not a one. And so we greet Christ as he enters into Jerusalem, pleading with Christ to save us, but as the events of Holy Week unfold, we learn exactly what the salvation Christ offers to us will cost. Amen.