

“THE NOT SO TRIUMPHAL ENTRY.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

April 13, 2025, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Mark 11:1-11

Introduction.

We all understand the irony of Palm Sunday, right? We all get how incongruent this whole day was on so many levels. The story of Palm Sunday is a story of great contrasts. The most glaring is how the crowds go from shouting hosannah to shouting crucify Him just five days later.

Then there is the incongruity of the day itself, Jesus' going public in such an unusual and humble manner. Jesus really could have used a Triumphal Entry Planning Committee. He needed some people who knew how to put on a parade with all the necessary pomp and circumstance fitting for great an occasion and so great a dignitary.

Imagine if Jesus had the benefit of the committee that pulls off the Tournament of Roses parade in Pasadena, California? Now you are talking. There would have been the Jerusalem High School marching band, maybe a Scottish bagpipe band. Jesus would have come in on a huge white horse with a beautiful silver saddle. There would have been more than tree branches and people's clothes spread out.

He would have ridden into the great temple and sat on King David's throne. As the newly established king He would overthrow the Romans and put the Jewish authorities in their place. That was the Messianic expectation that prevailed over the political and religious climate of the day. He really was supposed to make Israel great again, and throw off the oppression of the ruling political party of the day.

The rabbis expected it, the disciples expected it, the crowds expected it. Think about how the crowds went from hosanna to crucify Him in five days. How does that happen? What happened that created such a 180-degree change of opinion? Huge disappointment because of unmet expectations. Jesus failed to live up to His billing. Jesus failed to rise to the expectations of the people which led to utter disappointment.

They thought they were witnessing a political event, participating in a militaristic takeover. They thought they were celebrating the power and authority of a man who would drive out the Romans and the oppressive rulers.

God rejects the values and priorities of the world. Jesus once said the things which are highly esteemed among men are an abomination in the sight of God.

Jesus shows us by how He handles the events of this Holy Week, that He is not interested in pleasing us or making us happy or giving us what we think we want or need, He is not interested in meeting or fulfilling our expectations. He is not interested in sparing us from great disappointments. He has only one interest in mind, saving us.

Glorifying the Father, by bringing about the redemption of our souls.

Think about how Palm Sunday gives us a glimpse of God's priorities and how God works in our lives, and what lessons we should draw from that. How many of you sneak a peek at the last chapter or last page of a book you are reading?

We can't do that with our lives. Our lives don't come with little movie trailers, with glimpses of what's ahead. Our lives don't come with spoiler alerts that prepare us in advance for some plot twist. We are left with the unpredictable and unexpected, surprising nature of life. We don't know what the author of our story is doing or why.

Think about Joseph, the youngest of twelve brothers, who was suddenly sold by his brothers to be slave to some Ishmaelites, who sold him to an Egyptian, Potipher. As slaves go Joseph had it pretty good, but then that unraveled with false accusations from Potipher's wife which landed him in jail, where he rots totally forgotten for a couple of years. End of story, right. Don't you think he must have thought so? Who knows what is next?

Joseph languishing in chains in jail could have come to all kinds of wrong assumptions and false conclusions. That was his Good Friday.

God isn't interested in our happiness, our comfort, in pleasing us or meeting our expectations, He is interested in salvation. Joseph's long season of suffering opens the way for the salvation of the Israelites. Joseph's Good Friday becomes Israel's Easter.

Genesis 45:7-8 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

It is only when we get to the very end of Joseph's story we can say, "Look what God has done."

Consider Naomi and Ruth. Both widows, destitute, with no means of support or hope. Lower than a snake's belly in a wagon rut. Naomi changes her name to Bitter, because God has dealt bitterly with her. End of story. Give up, throw in the

towel, it's over. But God is the author of our stories, and it isn't over until He says it is over. Boaz enters the story from out of nowhere, one of those it-just-so-happen events, and he redeems Ruth, and Ruth bears Obed, who was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

God doesn't spare them from heartache, trauma, despair, suffering. God is interested in salvation, in redemption, in eternal ends and purposes. Only at the end can Naomi and Ruth say, "Look what God has done." Naomi and Ruth's Good Friday leads to their Easter.

This doesn't just apply to the heroes and great saints of the Bible.

Amy Carmichael, was born in Ireland in 1867, she followed the call of God and the desire of her heart to be a missionary in Japan. But after less than two years she was too sick to continue and returned home. Broken dreams, unmet expectations, disappointment. Her story is over. Right? Give up? No.

She traveled to southern India, started an orphanage and had a great ministry rescuing over a thousand little girls from the cruelty of temple prostitution. She ministered there 56 years often through suffering. God was the author of her story, a story of redemption, salvation, deliverance. At the end she could say, "Look what God has done."

John and Betty Stam, American missionaries in China, served less than two years when they were captured by communists and martyred in 1934. Their lives ended almost before they started. End of story? Defeat, death? The news of their martyrdom spread throughout the world, and in response to that news hundreds, even thousands of new missionaries followed God into service in China. The Chinese church grew stronger than ever. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. "Look what God has done." Look at the salvation He has brought about.

The same story is repeated by **Jim Elliott** and the other four missionaries killed by the Auca Indians in Ecuador. Just 28 years old, just starting out and their lives and ministry ended. Disappointment, defeat, wasted lives? No, God is the author of their story and their lives became the inspiration to hundreds of missionaries who followed the call of God into missions. And the salvation of the Auca Indians by the ministry of those widows. (Jim Elliott's widow, Elizabeth Elliott wrote a biography of Amy Carmichael, *A Chance to Die*).

How about modern-day **Joni Eareckson Tada** suffering a terrible diving accident at the age of 19 and sinking into depression and despondency as a quadriplegic. Her life over, her story over, what good can come? But God rescued her and saved her and then gave her a far greater ministry from her wheelchair, giving light and life

and hope to so many. And her story isn't over yet, but "Look what God has done!" Her Good Friday, and led many into a Easter hope and salvation.

This is the power of the truth of Palm Sunday and Holy Week. Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, unjustly arrested, falsely accused, brutally abused, horrifically whipped, nailed to a Roman cross, crucified, dead and buried. Everything goes dark. He is dead, the story is over. But God, the author of all stories, says it is not over, death couldn't hold Him. "Look what God has done!"

And these lessons apply to those in our lives who are prodigal sons or daughters, grandsons or granddaughters. You don't know the end of the story until the author of the story writes it.

Remember the story of the prodigal. He squandered his life on sinful living, sinful choices, sinful decisions. He ended up in a pigsty eating pig food. Defeated, dejected, disappointed. End of story? But who is writing our stories. Who knows the end from the beginning? God is not done until it is over.

We can't just read the introduction and opening chapters of our stories and think we know how it will turn out. Only at the conclusion can we find out the story God is writing.

The severe providences of God can make us think it is over, there is nothing good that can come. Pain, suffering, heartache, tragedy, sleepless nights, disappointing, unexpected twists and turns in the plot, God isn't afraid to use them all as tools for His glory and His purpose of salvation.

What is the point of all of these stories? The stories of countless others who have gone before us are meant to give us faith in God, and the story He is writing in our own lives. The benefit of other people's stories is to give us perspective, to increase our faith in the midst of our own lives.

Don't jump to any conclusions about your life, withhold judgment, don't decide it is over or useless or worthless. You have to read to the end. None of our stories will fully make sense until the last page is written, until the last dot is connected. Trust the writer, trust the author who will tie up all the loose ends. Trust the author who brings light out of darkness and life out of death and is always working redemptively.

Philippians 1:6 I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

How can we endure the Palm Sundays and Good Fridays of life? How can we walk by faith when sight is so confusing, disorienting, disappointing?

The way Jesus did it. The very resources Jesus used to live His life are the same resources He gives to all of us who trust and follow him. Let me mention three briefly, *courage, obedience, humility*.

Courage.

In Luke's Gospel we are told "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, *he set his face to go to Jerusalem*" (Luke 9:51).

Jesus' courage to go into Jerusalem and face the cross is His gift to us. That same strength of character that enabled Jesus to enter Jerusalem to face such fierce opposition and hatred, that same strength that gave Him that courage He also gives to us. When our world turns against us He gives the courage to stand, to not cave in to fear or doubt.

The Spirit of Christ in us enables us to have His courage. If God is for us, who can be against us? Courage is a reflection of our confidence in our God. Be strong and courageous.

Obedience.

Jesus submitted to the Word of God whatever the cost, whatever the pain, whatever the suffering. We see Jesus' obedience in how He fulfilled what was written in the OT.

Zechariah 9:9 Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Jesus radically changes our perspective on life and death. Preserving our lives is not our highest goal in life, obedience to God and faithfulness to His Word are more important. This is what strengthens our courage in the face of whatever comes.

James 1:22 Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Humility.

Jesus rides in on a borrowed donkey, sitting on people's clothes, to the praise of children and poor people. Do you see the irony? The sovereign Lord has lived a life of humiliation, from a virgin's womb to this moment. He is humble and He humbles Himself. Jesus is not like any other prophet, priest or king who ever lived. Jesus, the Son of the living God, intentionally humiliates Himself, and in so doing

He humble us. He exposes our pride, our own desire for importance and recognition.

I Peter 5:5 Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Christians live by a different principle. That is why, in the midst of circumstances which would panic others, Christians are calm. We are not to reflect the panic, the anxiety, and the troubled countenance which others display when they get into difficulty. We face our Palm Sundays and Good Fridays with the courage, obedience and humility of Jesus. We embrace our Good Fridays knowing Easter is the end of the story.

May the character of Christ live in us by the Spirit of Christ and through the power of God.

Implications and application.

Have you ever misunderstood Jesus’ purposes in your life, praising Him one day and despairing the next?

How often are we disappointed in Jesus, because we are thinking one way and He is going another way? How often are our expectations different because we can’t see the big picture, the whole picture of what God is doing?

The sovereignty of God means that in times of *fear and anxiety* we can rest secure in the power of God. This was how Jesus could sleep through a storm. He had absolute and total trust in His heavenly Father. The sovereignty of God means you can have that kind of peace and confidence in the midst of your storms.

The sovereignty of God teaches us in **adversity** to be patient for all things must work according to the perfect and good counsel of God for our salvation. It will all be spiritually profitable.

“Hosanna, blessed is He who comes.” Lord, save us. That is exactly right. That is the prayer. The greatest need of all of humanity on all of the earth is to be set free from the bondage of sin and death. The greatest need of every person on this planet is to be saved. And that is exactly what He came to do.