

Ordinary 6

Coats

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Salem United Methodist Church

YAY! It's Palm Sunday! Today is the day we shout Hosanna, wave palm branches!
Celebrate the coming of the King!

Today is the day the revolution begins!

He is here!

PRE-SCRIPTURE:

Pray for understanding.

Okay, since it's Palm Sunday we need to be interactive. When you hear the words "palm" or "branch" you're going to wave your arms in the air. When you hear the people say "hosanna" you're going to shout HOSANNA! If you're on our Zoom group, you can type it into the chat!

And now, let us hear the words of scripture. Luke 19:29-40

²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, “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. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” ³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴ They said, “The Lord needs it.” ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was now 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, ³⁸ saying,

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

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

SERMON

Wait! No palms. I didn't hear it. Did you? And no hosannas!

I couldn't have missed it!

That's not right...

It can't be Palm Sunday without palms. Without hosannas.

If you were raised in the church, you know what I'm talking about. At my home church we would do a procession of the palms every year where we marched around the church singing Hosanna.

This can't be right.

How can Jesus enter Jerusalem for the beginning of Holy week without palms?!

Discuss meaning of palms and coats

This is a genuine Palm Sunday reading, not one I made up. This is a Palm Sunday reading without the palms. *Its reading like this: ones with surprising omissions or additions that convinced our Bible study class to go straight from Luke to Mark. They want to see what's going on. What the different writers are doing. What different audiences need. If you want to join our curious group, jump in with your questions, knowledge, honesty. It's all welcome.*

So, this is a genuine Palm Sunday reading... without palms. And without hosannas. Instead, the scene begins oddly. It opens with Jesus telling two disciples to go

procure a colt. He mounts it as the disciples lay their own coats onto the colt's back. At this point? The crowd seems to be... silent. If they're watching, they aren't talking about Jesus. They may accompany him, but they aren't shouting his praises. No, they don't begin to shout until they reach the Mount of Olives. That's a mile or two for their procession. So, about 10-20 minutes. Perhaps its reverent silence. Perhaps they're chattering about daily life. Perhaps they are wandering next to Jesus on accident and are just going into town for the day.

And then. As they approach the city, something **builds** within the disciples. They begin to shout. *And suddenly they aren't in an anonymous crowd, they're in a crowd of disciples shouting praise to their king.*

And... the Pharisees were upset-with good reason! This guy *isn't the king*. If the political authorities hear this, we'll **all** be in trouble. They better shut their mouths. The leaders won't distinguish between a "good Jew" and an *overthrowing Jew pretending to be king*. They're going to label everyone a threat.

We know what this is like. We see it in racial profiling all the time in our country. All blacks look the same. All Asians look the same. All Mexicans. All. All. All. **One** does something wrong, and we blame everyone. The Pharisees knew it would happen. They knew oppression for their people could get worse.

So they tell Jesus to *keep.the people.quiet*. Do the right thing. Keep everyone safe.

But Jesus doesn't silence them, even though they're *not exactly right* about their assumptions. He lets them shout with their whole joyful hearts. He knows they can't understand the kind of King he is. He understands our need to shout our praise.

Can you imagine someone important, like Dr. Fauci, or our Bishop, or the president! If they don't seem important to you, think of someone who does! Perhaps a celebrity or a relative of yours that you really, really respect. Can you imagine them wandering into the back of the sanctuary for worship and just sitting silently? From the moment you recognize them for who they are, you are likely deeply uncomfortably not acknowledging them. Perhaps, if they asked about our prayer shawls, we'd **leap up to grab one**. Imagine how it would feel if they said, "no, no, let me get it myself." Can you imagine sitting on your hands and letting them go do it themselves? If our Bishop were here, **I'd want her to feel respected, to feel honored**. To feel extremely welcome. I don't think I'd lay my coat on the ground for her to walk over (that would be weird!), but I'd certainly get a prayer shawl for her!

And... if she were here I don't think she'd want that. I don't think she'd want excessive ceremony. But she would likely be gracious and let me stumble over myself to be respectful. She'd know that I was doing my best and that I was uncomfortable doing nothing. That's my guess anyway.

Sometimes, we lose our heads in the presence of powerful or influential people.

And Jesus? I think he had compassion for that.

I think the people saw their **king** riding into town and they wanted him to *have the honor he deserves*. Kings rode into town with their entourage shouting their praises. People laid their coats down to prevent the dust from messing up the king's clothing. It's a red carpet, but *more*.

You see, people were likely to only own one or two coats. We don't know if they laid down their best coat or their everyday coat. But we know that laying down a coat when you only have two is a sacrifice. Right?

I mentioned to some folks that it would be good to have a coat ready for worship today. Now would be a good time to look at it. If you don't have one handy, look outside! Which of your coats would you wear out today? Is it a nice coat? Warm? Cool? Fashionable? Sturdy? Utilitarian? Would it be weather-appropriate today? Do you like it? Now-many of you have experiences with horses. I only have a little. Would you throw it under a horses' hooves? A colt's? A pony's? I don't have a great sense of how much the hooves would damage fabric. I'm guessing less with a smaller animal and less if it doesn't have shoes. But still. I'm not crazy about tossing my coat on the ground. ***I've also seen the way horses' poop. They aren't exactly discriminating.*** If I toss my coat down, who knows what it will be like when I get to back! IF I get it back. It might turn into part of the road. Someone less honest may grab it and take it before I can get back to it. Someone may grab it on accident. It may be covered in poop, dust, and sweat that's not mine.

I have a ton of reasons not to throw my favorite coat on the ground. As a modern person with a very stable socioeconomic status, I have a number of coats. If I knew

I would be asked to give one up, I could go grab one I don't love or don't need and toss *that one* on the ground. Easy.

But what if it wasn't that easy? What if it was a hard choice? What if it was a risk?

What if.

What would be a risk for you? You see. Jesus didn't need them to throw their coats on the ground. He didn't need the triumphant entry. He didn't need their shouts of praise. He even says that if the people didn't shout *the very stones would cry out*. He knows that praise comes when it is right. He knows that he can't silence the praise of the people. He can't force them to bite their tongues. He can't convince them to keep their sacrifices and offerings to themselves.

Why? Because sometimes the risk is worth it. Have you ever met someone who just makes your heart sing and you just **NEED** to tell them-even if they don't feel the same way. You'll take a risk because you can't keep it inside.

The people take a risk for Jesus. They proclaim him their king. They do it in front of political leaders who may remember their faces. They sacrifice their coats so he can have a clean ride with the style that he deserves.

And he lets them. But *he* doesn't need it. *They* need it and he knows it.

I mean, really, Jesus is doing everything he can to **parody conventional kingship**. I mean, come on, he's riding a colt. How big is a colt? How often are colts big

enough to carry fully grown men comfortably? Those of you who ride will need to fill us in on what this looks like later. I know at least one of you men owns a pony. Would you ride it?? Comfortably? If you were trying to look like a king??

What I'm picturing? Pretty ridiculous. I mean, a large human with feet dangling down? Poor little horse struggling. Wouldn't he look more *dignified just walking*? And then... horror of horrors, he begins to weep. That's the next part of the scripture not in the bulletin.

I want to read the next few verses to you. I'll start with the approach to the Mt. of Olives.

³⁷ As he was now 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, ³⁸ saying,

*“Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
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³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” ⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

And now, the new part, in verse 41.

41 As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it,

Wait. Pause. Don't have any illusions. This is not casual crying. This is not a dramatic tear going down his face. This word means loud lamentation. To bewail. To sob. There is another Greek word for crying silently. This is intense crying. Let's continue.

41 As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. 44 They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God." [a]

Men, patriarchs, they didn't show feelings like this. And kings! They didn't weep on their way into a town. That's... not good leadership. Right? I mean, if you get a new boss at work and they come in weeping on their first day? And they're weeping about the company?? Or a new pastor! Weeping! A new therapist! A new doctor. A new political leader that you just voted for! Weeping.

Its, uh, not good optics. Leaders should come in with vision. Positive, future thinking vision! Should come in ready to fix things. Not projecting that enemies

will encircle you, dash you to the ground... not leave one stone on the other all because you didn't recognize God in your midst. They should, you know, *keep their feelings under control*. They can call something heartbreaking and then **discuss fixing it**. They cannot call it heartbreaking and then break into tears and tell you it is hopeless. What kind of king is this?

[...]

The disappointing kind. Jesus isn't the kind of king they want. He is the kind of king who won't force a 3-point plan for the redemption of Jerusalem on the people. He is the kind of king who will allow us to shout praises because we need it knowing that we've got it wrong. He's a king alright. But he's a king who puts others first. He's a king who will ride in triumphantly but will make it look ridiculous. He's a king who allows sacrifices [**GRAB COAT**] not because he needs it, but because we need to learn to let go of what we cling to. And we need to let go for the sake of a *king who will not live up to our expectations*. [**DROP COAT**]

Because that's what happens. The people have taken their risk *not understanding* that it comes with the humiliation and death of their leader. Can you imagine how it would go in #cancelculture? The people canceled him for not being what they expected. They had no way to know... no, *no way to understand!* that he was **so much more**.

I wonder. Of all the people who laid down their coats, how many showed up at the cross on Friday? Of all the people who laid down their coats, how many believed he

was a new kind of king? Of all the people who laid down their coats, how many **still believed** on Friday? And then, how many believed on Sunday?

If you take a risk, you're in it. You've got skin in the game. **Once you start? Going back is just as hard as going forward.** I wonder if the people who laid down their coats were the **first** to come back. Perhaps the risk of laying down their coats planted a hope seed within them. Unfortunately, the gospels are pretty clear. Almost everyone abandoned Jesus. Even Peter. Only a few women truly stayed the whole time.

...But *many* people laid down their coats. If they did that, perhaps it would be easier to believe later. Perhaps that means they were looking for a chance to believe. Perhaps they were disappointed in Jesus but still harbored a small, secret hope that he would be something special. And then, you know, *after* the resurrection, perhaps they could take a deep breath and let their hope seed bloom into something incredible. They could say they always hoped. They always wanted God to show up like this. They could come back to their belief having already laid down everything they have as they planted their deep hope.

Sometimes offering of ourselves, especially when its risky, is something that makes hope possible. Sometimes we don't start with hope. Sometimes we start with actions. Just showing up.

Just doing the next right thing.

Just one foot in front of another.

A risk-admitting a weakness, asking for help. **Another risk**- accepting it.

A risk-joining the committee. **Another risk**-speaking your mind about what's right.

What risks are available to you? Perhaps they're tangible, like giving away coats to people who are cold. Giving water to people in Texas, or Flint, MI. Bringing someone you don't know well a meal.

Maybe it's intangible. Making friends with a new neighbor even though you're shy. Standing up to your friends and family when they aren't speaking in a Christ-like manner.

We all have different risks. We have different things at stake. And some of our risks will be ordinary. And some of our risks? Well, they won't be ordinary. And they won't be the kind of risk I can rattle off from up here. They'll be personal. Sometimes it'll be the kind of decision that will change your life. Like the disciples, it will be something that even feels like a failed venture now but *becomes the groundwork for something incredible later*.

SERIES CONCLUSION

You're probably starting to realize this, but none of this is truly ordinary. This year for Lent I promised we'd talk about the things that are ordinary. We're using ordinary objects to get at something deeper. But what if the secret is that none of this is ordinary. Any life following God, no matter how normal on the surface, is a life of extraordinary courage, blessing, and depth.

It means you can look at your coat and see the blessing of risk taking in addition to the protection of coverage.

You can look at your cooking oil and think of blessings in the midst of challenges-not protecting you from experiencing them.

You can see your shoes and think of the comfort they provide (or don't provide!) and what it means to take them off and be vulnerable before God.

You can see coins and money and see security or abundance, but also see a chance to serve the God of the universe.

You can see the cross as a deep expression of love, sacrifice, and solidarity, rather than just a symbol to hang in your home.

And bread? Perhaps you'll see life-giving sustenance AND a communal act of how we can live as God's people.

And last? The dirty, annoying dust in our homes, in our allergy-stricken lungs, it can be simply a nuisance, or you can see the building block God chose to make us.

Not a single thing on this list is special. And yet, life with Christ? It allows us to live a life where even our ordinary moments can be times of profound praise.