

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • APRIL 5, 2020**  
**THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT**

**The Litany**  
**Based on Psalm 118**

*O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good.*

**Steadfast love endures forever!**

*Out of my distress I called on the Lord,  
and the Lord answered me and set me on solid ground.*

**Steadfast love endures forever!**

*With the Lord on my side, I do not fear.*

**Steadfast love endures forever!**

*It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.*

**Steadfast love endures forever!**

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

**Steadfast love endures forever!**

*Let us pray:*

**Open to us the gates of righteousness that we may enter through them.**

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**We thank you that you have answered us and become our salvation.**

**Hosanna and Hallelujah!**

**Song of Focus**  
***Blessed Is He***  
**Words and Music by Ed Varnum**

*Refrain*

Oh, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Oh, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

“Hosanna in the highest,” they all shouted with one accord.

Oh, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

*Verse*

There were crowds in Jerusalem at Passover time  
when they heard that Jesus was near.

And they sang loud hosannas with glorious shouts;  
was a sound that the Pharisees feared.

While the Pharisees plotted destruction,

it was drowned out by the crowd's loud cheers.

Oh, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

*Refrain*

Oh, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Oh, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

“Hosanna in the highest,” they all shouted with one accord.

Oh, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

## **The Scripture**

### **John 12:12-19**

*The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So, they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord— the King of Israel!” Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. The Pharisees then said to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”*

## **The Message**

### **All Groan Up: Culmination**

**Mark Briley**

**Synopsis:** *“The Pharisees took one look and threw up their hands: ‘It’s out of control. The world’s in a stampede after him’.” (John 12:19)*

It is often in hindsight that we say, *“That’s when everything changed.”* The tension may be building and the proverbial *“writing may be on the wall,”* but until that culminating moment comes, it’s hard to know how it will all go down. Palm Sunday marks such a moment of culmination for Jesus. The crowds cheer initially, but the mood swings quickly. What do you do in the wake of such moments? Fight? Flee? Serve? Jesus certainly points us in a particular direction.



Sometimes I feel like I'm just eating my way through this quarantine. I did see some advice, however, on how to slow the eating during this time of isolation. The wisdom? When you get up in the morning, put on your swimsuit instead of your sweatpants. Put on your swimsuit instead of your pajamas. Well? I haven't tried that yet. It's hard to truly see ourselves when living in crisis. We're all focused on surviving the next breaking news, but I wonder if you had a bird's eye view of your life right now, what picture would you see?

Or... if you really want to get an honest depiction of what you look like, ask a child to draw a picture of you. Don't ask them to do this if you don't really want to know what you look like. I have three children and have received many pictures of myself over the years that are unsolicited. My body is usually a little disproportioned, but they always draw me next to them, and we're all smiling or playing something or having a picnic, so I can't be too upset about the size they've drawn my head. I'll take it.

If you're brave enough to have a child draw a picture of you, you might ask them to draw a picture of God, too. It's a fascinating adventure and usually leads to some great questions being asked. You've probably heard about the kindergarten teacher who was walking around her room as her students were working on some art projects. One little girl was working really hard... had that determined look on her face as she worked on her drawing. The teacher asked, "*What are you drawing?*" The girl replied, "*I'm drawing God.*" Innocently, the teacher responded, "*But no one knows what God looks like.*" Without missing a beat or ever looking up from her paper the girl says, "*They will in a minute.*"

What if we just spent this typical sermon time with you watching this message at the kitchen bar counter in your sweatpants or your swimsuit... paper and pencil in front of you... and we all just drew our own pictures of God? Would you start right in with a picture of wind and flames like the Spirit blowing through the people on Pentecost? Would you draw a picture of Jesus in the middle of this pandemic – where would he be in your picture? Isolated at home? In a nursing home with someone who is alone? In a NYC emergency room? Or would you dive right into a more formal portrait of Jesus? How do you see him? Does he have a crooked nose like Owen Wilson? Is he laughing? Or is your Jesus more serious than that? Is he playing soccer with a group of kids? How would you draw your Jesus? Is he clean shaven – surely a member of the dollar shave club? Does he have the calloused hands of a carpenter? Does your

drawing place Jesus in a Norman Rockwell style painting? Do you picture him sitting next to you at the end of a dock like a Luke Bryan song?

When I was in China, I saw a number of depictions of Jesus as a Chinese man; much like the blonde hair, blue eye versions we see of Jesus around the States. We often tend to see Jesus through our own limited lenses of life. The image of Jesus has been drawn more than any other in history, and most pictures are connected to the events of this week. We see the end from here but that first Palm Processional of Jesus, no one had drawn such images just yet. In honesty, it was a culmination moment brewing that would not have unfolded as it did if Jesus didn't show up in Jerusalem that day on the back of a donkey. And all the donkeys of God said, "*You darn right.*"

Before the donkey was prepped and the palms were pulled from trees, Jesus was sitting in the home of his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Lazarus, you might recall, had just been raised from the dead. Mandatory 14-days of quarantine after you've been exposed to death, so he'll be at home for a hot minute. Judas is there, too. We don't know about any others. I picture a little breakfast-type table in the kitchen. Martha is serving, because well, that's her thing. At the table sits Lazarus, surely just slowly turning his hand in front of his face – "*I'm alive. I'm alive. I'm alive.*" Do you ever just sit and marvel at that? Jesus sits across from Lazarus. He's quiet. Extra slow movement of his coffee mug from the table to his lips and back again. Lots on his mind not unlike you and me. His questions that morning may be ours today. What's going to happen next? How is all of this going to play out? Can I recover from this? Mary sits as well. She's happy. Her brother is well and home, and all is right in her world. It's a peaceful moment, mostly. Judas sits across from her. He's fidgety and irritable. He's reading the Bethany Gazette and offering random commentary on politics and the headlines detailing Jesus' track record to this point – jars of Merlot at the Cana wedding; the son of a royal official skating on roller blades again in Capernaum after Jesus healed him, and now Lazarus – in the paper, in the flesh... once dead, now alive. Judas must think this is good news except he can't figure out why Jesus won't use his growing power to seize control.

The four of them sit there with mixed emotions and different expectations about what is important; about what will happen next. It's a culminating moment, and Jesus knows it. He's probably weighing his options. He could lay low a while longer. No doubt he could touch a few more lives if he saved his own. Who could blame him for that? And that seems like a win-win. *You've got to know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em*, right? Rest in peace, Kenny. On the other hand, he could go the way he's always taught – the way of self-giving over self-preservation. This calls for another sip of his hot coffee. Jesus was obviously uniquely positioned to do what he was going to do but there's something in it for us to learn as well. The choice between self-preservation and self-offering is *one* hard choice that is made again and again and again over the course of our lives.

I have known people who have made the choice of self-preservation and others who have made the choice of self-offering. I've sat with them in the closing days of their lives. You can generally tell which choice they have made by the peace with which they face their end. The truth of their choice is often most reflected in the peace of the lives of those they leave behind. And it's not all wrapped up in wills and estates and the like – it's wrapped up in the spirit, in the character, in the offering to another.

I have learned over the years that a legacy will cost you something – just as it cost Jesus something. It won't be the same, of course, but it will be costly. Time, talent, dreams, plans, passions – but mostly your heart and soul.

I was lamenting a bit a few years back with fellow parent of three children what it meant for them to run their kids around to ball games and practices and lessons and activities. Sometimes, the constant schedule drains you. My friend, who's kids are now grown, says, "*I'd give anything to see him play little league one more time.*" We're talking about the moments, yes, but more so, the legacy of spirit that comes with what we did with those moments. What are you choosing – self-preservation or self-offering?<sup>1</sup>

I don't know what transpired the rest of that night between dinner and breakfast the next morning at Mary and Martha's home. Did Jesus make a pros and cons list of heading into Jerusalem for the Passover? Did he play a game of Scattergories with his friends who were hosting him in his home? Maybe he went over that month's financials with Judas since he was with them. Judas was the treasurer, you know. I bet he prayed a good deal. Whatever the night held, the morning brought decision. He would go. It is often in hindsight that we say, "*That's when everything changed.*" The tension may be building and the proverbial '*writing may be on the wall*' but until that culminating moment comes, it's hard to know how it will all go down. Palm Sunday marks such a moment of culmination for Jesus. Everything he's taught. Everything he's lived. Everything he knows about his purpose feeds into this decision to get on a donkey and head into Jerusalem.

I saw a short clip of a guy who was telling a very mundane story about an experience he shared with his friend. They are just walking along the sidewalk where they live when they came across a table full of bagels and a long line of people. The sign simply read, "*Free bagels.*" This guy says, "*Cool. Free bagels. Let's get one.*" His friend said looking at the long line, "*Nah.*" "*What?*" The guy points to the sign and says, "*Free bagels.*" His friend kind of stammers again, "*No. Look at that line.*" As if astonished, the guy just says as matter-a-fact as he could, "*Free bagels.*" "*Nope. Line's too long.*" You would think the guy asked him to "*Sell all he had and give it to the poor.*" The point?

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<sup>1</sup> Self-preservation vs. self-offering and legacy idea inspired by work of Mark Feldmeir in his book, *Stirred not Shaken*. Chalice Press. 2005. Pg 53-58.

Some people see the goal, and some people only see the difficulty of reaching the goal. Legacies are built in and through the difficult moments. Those are the moments artists draw. Those are the moments we remember at the end of our lives.

So, on a donkey it is for Jesus. He's heading into Jerusalem for the Passover. This is an image that all four of the Gospel writers paint in a similar way which is a rarity. The triumphal entry is one of those uncommon stories even as John's version is much shorter than those we find in the synoptic gospels. It must have been memorable for them all to tell it the same way. The ceremonial crowds greeting Jesus, their "*Honk your Hosanna!*" as they shared in the palm caravan. The donkey. These details paint a portrait of Jesus as the rightful heir of David to the throne of Israel. Some point to the donkey ride as the part that makes the entry a humble one. Not really. Riding a donkey was a throne-change move since Solomon was anointed years before. He rode into the city on a donkey, too – David arranged the whole thing. The difference was the entourage – Jesus came without the signs of war – the chariots and guards and the whole thing. Even so, everyone drew their own picture of what they saw. And really, they saw it through the lens of their expectations.

We measure most of our experiences in life the same way. We set our expectations – we look for those details – and when we don't see them, we come undone. The religious leaders do so when they see Jesus enter the city. The theme verse of this passage is their reaction to their unmet expectations. "*The Pharisees took one look and threw up their hands: 'It's out of control. The world's in a stampede after him.'*"

This is how we deal with our frustrations particularly when we find ourselves in crises mode. I get calls from folks who are worked up about something and they'll say, "*It's just out of control!*" or "*He's out of control!*" or "*Somebody needs to reign her in!*" What we usually mean, at the root of our angst, is that "*This isn't going my way. This isn't how I envisioned it. This isn't the picture I drew.*"

This whole faith thing is hard. Jesus, even after making this decision to enter the city in full view of those who were out to kill him, later, in the garden sweat blood and prayed, "*God, there's surely another way. There's gotta be another way.*" I think we have an expectation that our faith life should be the easiest part of our lives. And I do hope there is comfort and hope and peace that comes in your faith journey, but to assume that there won't be a cost or some heartache or groaning in the process is not fair.

One of my brothers in the faith, a great teacher, a faithful, faithful man shared recently in a class he was teaching, "*This stuff is hard. It took me 50 years to accept Christ as Lord.*" And he was a church member. Fifty years of hearing the stories, drawing pictures of the faith, imagining a Jesus that fit into his lifestyle before a culminating moment changed things for him. If I could fly a paper airplane through your screen and toss you a pencil right now, I wonder what kind of Christ you would draw on your paper

given your/our current life circumstance. Is his true likeness something you can capture?

It's always been hard. Even those who knew him personally found it difficult. His true likeness. His character. When Jesus was with his friends – teaching, laughing, drinking wine, visible, touchable, knowable – even then he was seldom understood for who he was. On the day of the big festival when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, everyone present seemed to misunderstand who he was and where he was headed. They were drawing different pictures. Some drew a warrior, a king who might make Israel great again.<sup>2</sup> Some drew a riot-rousing rebel who was leading people down a terrible path. Some drew a celebrity like some we know today who are simply famous for being famous. His disciples were even confused and drew different pictures. They didn't understand humble service. Jesus knelt before them and washed their dirty feet. It blew them away. They bickered about their position in the Jesus administration. Even a few days from this entry, around a table, they would argue about position and status and who was greater. They didn't understand sacrificial love. He talked about laying down his life and they simply thought he was talking crazy. They didn't understand redemptive mission – even as Jesus told them, I came for the least of these, not for the ones you first think about drafting for your team. They didn't understand his welcoming compassion. His heart broke for the multitudes and his disciples tried to send them away. They didn't get prayer and why Jesus spent so much time doing it. They didn't understand discipleship and self-denial. They had seen the towel in action when he washed their feet, but they could not draw that image of Christ. It was just a towel, right? How about you and me? Do we get his true likeness? In this palm parade, we are certain of one thing: Jesus got it. He knew his purpose. If you asked him to draw a self-portrait, he could see it clearly – his self-portrait looked a lot like a cross.

We don't always know how things will come. My friend walked through the motions for 50 years... but then his heart... we just don't know. Someone said, "*It is the knowledge that I'm going to die that creates the focus I bring to being alive.*" Knowing he was going to die, Jesus brought a great focus to being alive. It shaped his living. It molded his relationships. It changed our world. There will be many different images of Jesus this week. Each one bringing focus and clarity to the life we are called to live as those who follow him. Will you come with us? Let's draw some pictures. Let's see if they don't look like welcome and compassion and sacrifice. Let's see if, in the end, they look a lot like resurrection.

May it be so.

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<sup>2</sup> The motif of images of Jesus inspired by the work, "*The Towel of Jesus*", by Bob Kaylor, Senior Minister of the Park City United Methodist Church in Park City, Utah.

