

## **Palm Sunday**

**March 29, 2026 • 10:30am**

**Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA**

### **The Rev. John M. Pitzer**

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen. You may be seated.

So I'm going to begin this morning with some three-word phrases, but I'm going to have you finish the phrase.

I'm going to give you the first word and the second word, and hopefully you will know what the third word is. I've got to tell you, it was a bit of a challenge at the 8 o'clock. I had to help them a lot, so I got rid of a couple of them.

In fact, when someone was leaving church this morning, he said, you need to begin with peanut butter and... Right? I said, that's a four-word phrase. So, but you know where I'm going with this. So here we go.

You're going to finish it for me. Faith over... You've got to be kidding me. We're going to try that again.

Faith over... Thank you. Keep the... Y'all are rolling. Love conquers... See how much better this is than the 8 o'clock? Never give... One person said in.

That's okay. That's okay. It's okay.

It's all good. This is much better than 8 o'clock. Forgive and... Last one that I hate to preach about all the time.

And this is maybe the easiest. Love always... Thank you. All right.

Now, I'm going to give you another three-word phrase that you probably have never heard. And I learned it from a teacher friend of mine. My first year of teaching, and many of you know that I taught second grade for a few years.

And as you also know, when you start a new job, you may be trained in a particular area by someone. Or you may even go to school to learn how to do that job. But it's really the people that you work with that make a difference in what you are learning and what you are able to do.

So this was Mrs. Higginbotham. Can you imagine seven-year-old children saying that last name? That's why she was called Mrs. H. And Mrs. Higginbotham was about this tall and had a booming voice about as much as I do. I mean, it was absolutely amazing.

And I heard her say one word. I didn't hear the other part of the phrase. And she would just say in a very booming voice to her class, Focus! And I didn't know that she was still continuing the phrase.

And I thought to myself, I could hear her from my room. I thought, you know, that's actually a pretty good word to use for second graders. Focus, because they lose.

Not that we don't lose focus as adults. But seven-year-olds, second graders, tend to lose focus often. So I would hear, Focus! I thought, okay, well, there's got to be something more to this.

So once I happened to be standing at her door, because I went over to ask her a question, and she said, Focus!

And then she looked at this child and she said, And finish. Well, she would say that in a very different tone, so I wasn't hearing it. And then it made total sense to me.

Focus and finish. It was brilliant for a seven-year-old in the middle of their second grade year. Focus and finish.

And I got to tell you, Mrs. H's little three-word phrase has stuck with me all my life. I could be in the middle of something very important where I'm a bit distracted, and I hear Mrs. H's voice. John, focus and finish.

That happened to me when I was getting my master's with the Dominican Order, when I was in graduate school. I kept hearing focus and finish, focus and finish. And when I went off to do my Anglican study year for the Episcopal Church, where we take the GOEs, the general ordination exams, and you ask any priest, that is not an easy week long of exams, and I would always hear Mrs. Higginbotham's phrase, Focus and finish.

Focus and finish. Mrs. H's words came back to me a couple of weeks ago, right in the smack in the middle of our Lenten season. Why? Because I recognized, realized, that I wasn't having a very good Lent.

Now, the season of Lent is one of my favorite seasons. It really is. And the church gives us this season so we can make positive changes in our lives.

We decide we're going this direction, we don't like that direction, so we stop what we're doing, and we go the other way. And the church gives us a whole six-week period to make those positive changes in our lives. And I love the season of Lent.

And my Lent was not going well. So then I knew I was going to be going off to retreat, and I thought it's a great time to jumpstart my retreat, or my Lenten season. And then I was a victim of all the trap, not the TSA mess, but the weather mess a couple of weeks ago in the Northeast.

And all of a sudden, when I was supposed to be going on a week-long retreat at a monastery in New York, I'm on a plane back to New Orleans because I couldn't get to the retreat. And all I could hear was Mrs. H's voice in the background. Focus and finish.

You don't have to have your retreat to make your Lent. Things can fall into place, and it can still be a powerful time for you. I don't know where you are in your Lenten season.

I've actually heard, because of all the chaos we have in our world, I've heard a lot of people say, this Lent's been okay. Hasn't been great. It's been okay.

Focus and finish. My friends, we just celebrated the palms in the middle of the rain outside. We processed in, and we hear this gospel today, and people don't realize that there's a connection to Palm Sunday.

Jesus enters Jerusalem, and after He enters Jerusalem, He makes His way to the temple. And that's when He goes to the temple, He's not very happy. And that's when He turns over tables.

The church is giving us a wonderful opportunity, starting today, a journey that is going to unfold in front of us. It started with Palm Sunday. God is making a way for us, opening a door for us.

Jesus walks into the temple. He's not happy. He turns over the tables.

God is making a way for us, opening a door for us. The next thing we celebrate in Holy Week, the washing of the feet, and the Passover, the Eucharist. What is God doing? Again, the same thing, opening up a door for us, making a way for us.

And where are we headed? To Jerusalem, for the crucifixion and the resurrection. I say to you all the time, it doesn't make any difference what you've done in your life, where you've been, or what you're going to do. The message that God tries to get across to us in every season of the church is that you are loved unconditionally no matter what.

That, my friends, is what we're supposed to be focusing on. Focusing and finishing the message that love always wins. Always.

So wherever you are in your spiritual journey, if you feel like you have not focused in a great way or a good way during your Lenten season, never fear. Never fear, because God is walking with you every step of the way. Opening up doors.

Making paths for your spiritual journey. We are on the verge of Holy Week. It's never too late to focus and finish.

As long as we are focusing and finishing on the last three-word phrase that I gave you that I keep hitting home this morning. Love always wins. God bless your spiritual journey and God bless your Holy Week.

Amen. Amen.