

Title: Everyone Loves a Parade, But Which One?

Text: Matthew 21:1-11

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Date: March 29, 2026

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Everyone loves a parade. Or at least, we think we do. There's something about the excitement surrounding the parade that draws us in. The music starts somewhere down the street. We can hear the drums and trumpets playing, just faint enough to make you lean forward. Then the rhythm builds as the people come into view, a cadence you can feel in your chest and witness in the crowd.

And then comes the colorful procession, the precise movement, the smiles of the crowd, and people waving, knowing they belong to something bigger. Maybe you remember one.

Maybe you remember one right here in Franklin. Perhaps you remember a Christmas parade winding through downtown Main Street, lined with families and children darting forward for candy thrown by Santa and his elves. Maybe you remember neighbors greeting neighbors and time slowing down just enough to remember who we are. And for a moment, everything feels right, ordered, celebrated, and hopeful.

Somehow parades do that. Somehow parades tell us: *This is worth celebrating. This is where we've been. This is who we are. This is where we're going.* And maybe that's why Palm Sunday feels so familiar. Because as we read this story, it feels like a parade.

We encounter people lining up the road, branches waving, and voices rising, "Hosanna! Save us! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." And maybe, possibly, we would have been there too. Caught up in the moment. Drawn into the excitement. Certain that something important was happening. Because we, too, love a parade.

But perhaps, because we live on this side of the empty tomb, we should slow down. Because we know this one is different. And if we've been paying attention through Lent and if we've been on the road with Jesus, we might already suspect that. Because this road to this point hasn't been straightforward. Our journey to Jerusalem, the city of peace, wound through dusty villages and a Samaritan woman at a well, around a night visit with Nicodemus, into conversations that didn't always make sense as a blind man is healed. All the time, we are headed toward a destination that Jesus keeps naming, but no one quite understands. And now, we are here in Jerusalem, and a parade. But maybe not the kind we expected.

Because if we listen closely, something feels, well, off. We expect to see the warhorse, but we do not. We expect to see an army marching, but we do not see any armor. There are no displays of power. Just Jesus riding on a donkey, and a borrowed one, at that. And maybe someone in the crowd wondered: "Is this really it?" Because they knew what parades were supposed to look like. We do too!

Rome certainly did. Rome's parades were unmistakable. On the other side of Jerusalem, the Roman regent, Pontius Pilate, arrives with power on display, domination made visible, and a reminder of who was in control. He represents another ruler, and another kind of kingdom.

We know the difference between those two parades, and the world had to decide what kind of power it believed in. But the crowd with Jesus and the one waving the palms? They had expectations. "Hosanna!" they cried. "Save us!"

Perhaps they meant: Save us from Rome. Restore our power. Give us our own king so we can be like the rest of the world. Give us the victory we've been waiting for. And maybe we understand that. Because don't we still want the same thing? Even here. We want the change a new ruler would bring and the promise they offer.

In a place like Franklin, where life can look polished, ordered, and successful on the surface, we still carry quiet longings. And maybe those longings feel heavier right now. As prices keep rising and the cost of ordinary life presses in, as jobs feel less certain for some and more demanding for others, as wars and rumors of wars seem to multiply across the world, and as divisions—political, cultural, even within families—run deeper than we expected, we find ourselves asking, perhaps more urgently than before: “Come, Lord Jesus, save us.”

Jesus' return would give us stability and clarity. Jesus' coming would give us something we can count on. And in a congregation like First Presbyterian Church, with its deep history, faithful witness, and strong sense of identity, we are tempted to imagine that the parade of faith is meant to steady all of that quickly. Jesus' return would offer strength, certainty, and reassurance that God is in control.

But Jesus keeps riding. And maybe that's where our questions begin. Why this way? Why this kind of king? Why this road?

Because our prophets said something about this, a king would come, but his coming would be gentle, humble, and riding on a donkey. And maybe that sounded beautiful in theory. But in reality? Well, we feel unsettled. Because this parade doesn't solve everything overnight.

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem doesn't immediately fix the economy, silence the headlines, or erase conflict or division. And yet, we instinctively know he reveals something deeper.

And here's something we may miss if we look too closely. Because Palm Sunday is not the only parade this week. Another parade is coming soon, with another procession and another crowd. And if we stay on the road with Jesus, we will see it. Because the road doesn't stop at the city gates. Rather, this parade winds its way to a hill.

And there, there is another kind of parade. No palm branches this time. No cheers. Just a cross. And a procession of suffering. Soldiers marching. A condemned man stumbling. A small crowd watched, some grieving, some jeering, and some were silent.

And maybe his mother is there. Maybe the women are there as witnesses. Maybe his beloved friend is there. And maybe, through Matthew's storytelling, we are there too. Because this is still the road with Jesus. But it's not the parade we wanted.

This moment is where the Gospel presses into our lives together as a church. Because if we are honest with ourselves, we know ministry in this complicated moment may feel less like a parade of certainty and more like a road of faithful endurance.

We are a people of faith committed to walking with people who are anxious about their future. We are praying with those who feel the weight of financial strain. We are present with those holding space for grief shaped by war, violence, and loss. And all of us are navigating conversations where political and religious differences feel sharper than before.

And perhaps the temptation is to rush ahead and get quickly to the “next parade.” We want the one that feels clear, resolved, and ready to celebrate again. But Jesus doesn't rush. He walks. And he invites us to walk with him through uncertainty, through humility, and through trust.

Because in this moment, we learn who God really is. Not in the easy celebrations of the parade of palms, but in the costly cross-shaped love of Christ. Friends, God does not save from a distance. God does not rule by force. Despite denominations and church divisions, God does not build the church by mirroring the world's factions and divisions. Rather, God meets us on the road. God holds us in the tension. God is present even when the future feels unclear. And that's not just surprising. Frankly, I find it unsettling.

Because the Gospel turns everything upside down. Or maybe, perhaps, the Gospel turns everything right side up. Because what looks like weakness is where God's strength is known. What looks like uncertainty is where faith takes root. What looks like a world unraveling is the very place where God is quietly, persistently at work. And maybe that's why the crowd changes.

Because everyone loves the first parade, but not everyone can follow the second. The first group loved "Hosanna," but not everyone wants the cross. And maybe, if we're honest, we feel that tension too. Because it's one thing to celebrate together in a sanctuary like this, but quite another to trust God when the world beyond these walls feels unstable.

But here's the mystery. Here's the grace. If we cast our vision a bit further into the future, we see there is still one more parade. Because the road doesn't end at the cross. Although we may think it does, it feels hopeless, there is more. Because just when everything seems lost and when silence settles in and when hope seems buried, God does something new.

And perhaps, we can call it a parade, too. Not with drums and banners. But with an empty tomb. With whispered astonishment, the women are told: "He is not here." With footsteps running in a garden, they tell the good news to the disciples locked in the upper room. With hearts burning on a road to Emmaus, they are excited by one who seemed dead but now appears alive.

This moment is our quiet, unexpected, and unstoppable Easter parade. And that understanding suddenly changes everything. Not because every problem disappears overnight, but because hope is no longer tied to circumstances. The road we thought ended continues, and the fear we thought defined us loosens its grip. The future we cannot control is in the hands of a God we can trust. And maybe—just maybe—this is what we are learning together, **on the road with Jesus**: That we are always on the way.

We are on the road, being delivered from our anxiety and called to trust. We journey from fear to faithfulness. From division... to a deeper kind of unity rooted in Christ. So yes, everyone loves a parade. But this week asks us: Which one?

The one that promises quick fixes? The one that looks like control? Or the one that leads through humility, through surrender, and through self-giving love? Because Jesus doesn't abandon the parade. Rather, he transforms it. He turns it into a journey, a road, and a call to follow a way. And he invites us, not just to watch, but to walk with him.

Yes, we are called to join in the march of the parade, right here in Franklin, and right in this church, and in this uncertain world. All the way. From palms... to cross... to a tomb... to resurrection.

And if we dare to stay on that road with him, we may discover that this upside-down, cross-shaped, Spirit-held way is not only the truest celebration of all, but this journey is the only hope strong enough to carry us through times like these. Amen.