

East Hartford
Palm Sunday 2014

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Psalm 118:1,2 19-29, Matt 21:1-11

Today, The Parade . . .

Today there will be a parade - a parade of pride, joy, a celebration of scholar athletes and coaches who have proven themselves to be the best in the nation. I want to thank Geno and Kevin Ollie for scheduling this principle celebration of Connecticut faith to coincide with the lesser feast of the Christian faith - Palm Sunday!

All kidding aside! OK! On your feet and let's hear it !! U Conn- U Conn - U Conn!!

Today, the first day of Holy Week, is the only week of the church year that begins with a parade, and "Who doesn't love a parade?" While the world had not yet gotten around to brass bands, some of the other essential elements of parades are here: The cheering crowds going ahead and following Jesus, and the hero himself astride a parade animal, the jenny and her foal. Donkeys are definitely are not the war horses and chariots of the Roman army, rather, the king mounted on a donkey was a symbol, the proclamation that the king comes in peace. And the leafy branches and strewn cloaks form some sort of precursor to what we call "red carpet."

Here we are 21 chapters into the Gospel of Matthew, and once again the writer goes to great lengths in speaking with his Jewish audience - first inserting the reference from prophet Zechariah that would convince his readers that Jesus was indeed the long promised messiah -

*"Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

Then laying it on a little thicker - Matthew is the only one of the four who identifies Jesus as the Son of David in the cheers of the crowd. He says, *“the crowd that followed and the crowd went before him cried out: “Hosanna to the Son of David!”*

Then and only then, Matthew joins Mark, Luke and John in writing: *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*

The story goes on
When he entered Jerusalem all the city was stirred, asking, *“Who is this?”*

Suddenly, at this most important question, Matthew retreats a little, - Now in his account, the crowd says nothing like Son of David - rather the crowd says simply, *“This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.”*

If the parade, the triumphal entry into the city was Jesus' 9:30 appointment, his noontime date is at the temple - and you remember that story with the overturned tables, and his holy fury.

That event will be followed by many parables, much teaching and more as you will hear.

I wonder, was Matthew, writing with the benefit of 60-70 years of hindsight, in a time of persecution for the church, leading his readers to the edge of the week that is to come? Was he standing on the edge of triumph - looking as it were over the edge into the abyss into the week that generations hence will call “holy?” An O'Donovan speculation!

Now we must ask, what are we to do - how are we to pray - we who live not with a few decades hindsight, but with 20 centuries?

Well - first things first. If you're planning on attending today's parade do it - do it with gusto. Wear husky blue, go early enough to get a

parking spot somewhere near Bushnell Park, and cheer til you're hoarse enough to lose your voice in joy! This is the day our God has made - rejoice and be glad in it.

Then tonight, and all through this week, read and reread the story as each gospel writer has told it. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Pay particular attention to the crowd - the crowd that cries, "Hosanna, to the son of David!" The crowd that backs away and says simply, "this is the prophet, Jesus." When are we part of the crowd shouting Hosanna - and when are we part of the crowd that backs away? When are we part of the crowd that will yell, "Crucify!" at the top of their lungs?

Read and reread the story. Try every character on for size - the two disciples who find and bring the donkey and her foal to Jesus. Who owned those donkeys? What was reported to them as the disciples brought the donkeys back? Read these stories and let your imagination fill the gaps between the bits of information.

What does it feel like to lay your cloak on the donkey's back? On the road? Are you among those who cut branches from the trees?

Read and reread the story to learn your answer to the city's question, "who is this?" Who is the one riding on that donkey - for you? A prophet, a savior - your savior? Christ your redeemer?

Read the rest of the stories that lie between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday.

Where are you when Jesus is clearing the temple?

Which of the parables make sense - which are mysteries?

Where are you when the lawyer asks, "Rabbi, which is the greatest commandment."

What think you of the parable of the talents?

When are you among the sheep and when do you keep company with the goats?

Friends, accept this gift of Holy Week as a time to play and to pray with the stories of the time. Let us do this with laughter and with tears. Let us do this to find ourselves and our God. Let us do this remembering that each and every day is a day which God has made, so let us rejoice and be glad in it.