

Palm /Sunday 2025 “Let the stones cry out”

One of the things that I notice when people come to church, is that they often pause at the top of the steps, waiting at the gateway before entering the porch. Sometimes it's to catch their breath after the climb up the hill, other people wait and turn to look around the churchyard, especially on a sunny day. Today, on Palm Sunday, just as some people stand at the top of the steps, we too stand at a gateway – the gateway to Holy Week. Today serves as a time to pause, and catch our breath or survey the landscape, before we journey through Holy Week.

As part of our liturgy for today we always read the gospel of the palms from Hallgarth, before we process into church. It's a story we know well and is perhaps one of the most energetic and colourful in Luke's gospel. It's joyful: we can imagine children waving palm branches, the crowds of people shouting “Hosanna” and gleefully throwing their cloaks down on the ground like a royal carpet.

The story of Palm Sunday begins just as Jesus is approaching the Mount of Olives. He sends two of his disciples ahead to fetch a colt, one that has never been ridden. That may seem like a small detail, an offhand remark inserted by Luke when he wrote his gospel. However, in scripture, unbroken animals were often used for sacred purposes. An unriden colt wasn't chosen randomly.

The disciples go on their errand, and sure enough they find the colt, just as Jesus said they would, and bring it to him. They throw their cloaks on it, and Jesus climbs on. It was probably a very shaky ride as the colt would have tried to throw Jesus off, never having experienced a rider before. Far from the serene image of Jesus calmly riding into Jerusalem, it would have needed a lot of coaxing and goading to make the colt go along. Although it isn't mentioned in the gospel, I rather like the humanity of an image of Jesus trying to climb on, being thrown off, and then laughing as he picked himself up and dusted himself off, before trying again, the disciples holding the colt steady as best they could. Perhaps this was a moment of levity, of laughter and companionship, before the serious business of the events of Jesus' final week in Jerusalem.

As he rides along, people spread their cloaks on the road—an ancient way of showing honour, like rolling out the red carpet, the joyful procession begins. Luke says that “the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.” If you are blessed with a visual imagination, perhaps you can picture it? The sounds of shouting and singing, the hum of people converging and gathering. The bright sun over the Mount of Olives, the sense of hope in the air, and all the people shouting, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

And yet, while the crowd sees a king riding into Jerusalem, this is no ordinary king. In the ancient world, when a king rode into an area on a warhorse, it meant conquest. It was a show of power, of dominance. Jesus doesn't choose a warhorse, he chooses a humble colt. This is a king not coming to conquer or to dominate, but a king who comes in peace. Jesus fulfils scripture by entering Jerusalem in this way, perhaps deliberately acting in such a way as to fulfil Zechariah's prophecy which said

“See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey.” (Zechariah 9:9).

Jesus is making a statement here: he is a king, yes, but not the kind the world expects, not a tyrant or dictator, not a political revolutionary like some Biblical Che Guevara. Not a man of violence, a man of peace - indeed he is the Prince of Peace, and he rules not with a sword, but with love. Not from a throne, but a humble donkey.

As the crowd rejoices, not everyone is thrilled. Some of the Pharisees in the crowd say to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” They’re uncomfortable. Maybe they’re worried about stirring up trouble with the Roman authorities, who would surely have been watching with hands on swords in case the crowd got out of hand. Maybe they think this kind of praise goes too far. Maybe they just don’t see Jesus as anything special. But Jesus responds with one of the most beautiful lines in all of Scripture: “I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” The joy and truth of who Jesus is cannot be silenced. Even if the people were quiet, nature would take up the song. That’s how deep this moment runs. This is not just a happy parade. This is the arrival of the king of all creation.

Here is something interesting: Luke’s Gospel doesn’t mention palm branches or the word “Hosanna.” Instead, he focuses on the theme of peace: “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” That echoes what the angels said at Jesus’ birth: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.” Peace at His birth; and peace as He enters the city that will crucify Him. Luke is telling us something powerful: Jesus brings peace from beginning to end.

So, what does Palm Sunday mean for us today? Naturally, it’s a call to recognize Jesus as King. Not just a good teacher or a kind man, but the King who brings peace—not peace that’s temporary or fragile, but the kind that reaches deep into our souls and makes us whole. Second, it’s a challenge to examine our own hearts. Are we like the joyful crowd, quick to praise when things are going well—but silent when faith gets costly? Or are we willing to follow Jesus, even when the road leads to the cross? Third, it’s an invitation to embody the peace of Jesus in our own lives. In a world full of division and noise, can we be people who carry the peace of Christ into our relationships, our communities, and our choices?

Palm Sunday reminds us that praise cannot be silenced: even when faith is hard, when the world doesn’t understand, or when our voices feel weak. Jesus says, “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” But let’s not leave it to the stones – let *us* be the ones who cry out. Let’s be the ones who sing, who wave our palms, who welcome the King not just into Jerusalem, but into our hearts, our homes, and our lives.

Because the King has come, and he comes in peace. In the words of one children’s hymn: “we have a king who rides a donkey”. Amen.