

John 12:12-16

Heading to Easter

Today's service included bible presentations to our Foundation, Year Three, and new students at St John's. The brief sermon included the children making crosses out of palm fronds. This edited version contains just the central message.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday. This was the day Jesus entered Jerusalem with excited crowds greeting him. God's people had been expecting a Messiah. God had made this promise to them through the prophets. A Messiah was going to come to save God's people. Messiah means anointed one, a person with a special role in leading the people. And the Messiah was meant to defeat God's enemies and restore God's people.

The crowds greeted Jesus as if he were a victorious king returning from battle. And this wouldn't happen anywhere else but Jerusalem. This was the city that King David made to be the capital of his kingdom many years before. This was the city where David's son King Solomon built God's holy temple. Jerusalem was where everything important happened and would happen.

So, when Jesus came into Jerusalem, the people shouted words that had been written hundreds of years before in Psalm 118. They waved palm branches just like in that psalm. The story of God's people was unfolding just as God's word said it would. But most of the people missed something important. God hadn't promised a Messiah who would fight battles and destroy their enemies. What God had promised was a humble Messiah who would redeem his people. Not by fighting against their enemies, but by laying down his life for them.

Their king would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Now a donkey isn't very special. Normally you just use it to carry lots of stuff around. If you want to ride somewhere, you use a horse. But listen to our reading again:

Jesus found a donkey and rode on it, just as the Scriptures say, "People of Jerusalem, don't be afraid! Your King is now coming, and he is riding on a donkey."

This quote was from the prophet Zechariah. The Old Testament tells us exactly what's coming in the New Testament. The whole bible, the whole of God's word for us is telling the same story.

This celebration of Palm Sunday, with the excited crowds and the palm branches, is always pointing us towards Easter. Jesus enters Jerusalem knowing what's coming next. He's going to die for the sins of the whole world. For us. For all people. And so today I want to leave you with a reminder of that. The joyful celebrations of Palm Sunday always point us to the cross. That's where Jesus is headed. And so, we're going to attempt to make some palm frond crosses. The very palm leaves used to celebrate today will remind us of the cross. And as this week goes on, these palms will look more and more dead, reminding us of the great price Jesus paid for our sake.

At this point, the palm frond crosses were made.

So, whether or not you've finished making your cross, this is our reminder of why Jesus entered Jerusalem. The crowds greeted him as a king, but his special moment was really the cross. He came to die for our sake, to pay the price for our sin, and to give us eternal life with him.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending Jesus as the promised Messiah. Help us to remember why he came to earth. May these palm frond crosses point us from the joy of Palm Sunday to his death on the cross for us. Amen.