

Are We Really Following Our King?

C- Palm Sunday – Luke 19:29-40; Philippians 2:5-11

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Sermon-in-a-Sentence: We are challenged to follow and worship Jesus as the King he is, the King he demonstrated with his life, not as the king we would like for him to be.

Children's Sermon [Before the Parade]:

Usually, when we are trying to tell someone or a group of people something really important, we talk to them using “**words.**” But sometimes, words are not enough. Sometimes we have to **act out** or demonstrate what it is we are trying to tell the group, so they can really “hear” what we are saying; not just with their ears, but with their “mind” and their “heart.”

You could greet a brother or sister, or your Mom or Dad, on their birthday, with just words, “Happy Birthday!” Or you could buy them some flowers or a gift or a card and give it to them, and say, “Happy Birthday!” with words and actions. Which would communicate your love better?

Or maybe your parents tell you not to do something, but you do it anyway. They could just tell you again with words not to do it; or they could take action. They could spank you or put you in a timeout. Which would be more effective just using words to tell you again and again not to do something, or taking action by spanking or putting you in time out?

Sometimes actions speak louder than words, or actions and words together speak louder and clearer than just words.

With words, we can say we “believe” in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. But with actions, we can actually follow Jesus and follow the Jesus Way.

That’s what Jesus did in the story I just read for you, and in many ways, that’s what all the special services of Holy Week are about. Not Jesus just saying **words** to his disciples, but Jesus **doing, acting out** what he wanted his disciples and us to hear and understand in our hearts.

And at our special Holy Week services, including today, it’s not just us reading words from Scripture, or me telling you stories, it’s about acting out, actually doing

some of the things Jesus and his disciples did, so we can hear and understand, on a deeper level.

So in today's Gospel reading, instead of just preaching another sermon, Jesus plans a parade! He finds a young donkey to ride. His followers lay their coats on the road and wave palm branches as he passes by.

So let's act out Jesus' parade. OK? Who wants to ride the donkey like Jesus? Who wants to wave some palm branches?

Children's sermon [After Parade:]

What does this parade say to you, and all of us? Why did Jesus plan a parade where he rides on a donkey, and why did all the people who have been following him and listening to him line the streets and put their clothes out on the road for Jesus' donkey to walk on, and wave palm branches and sing songs and praise him? What is this parade saying?

In those days, when someone had a big parade into a city like Jerusalem, they would ride a big horse, and were trying to say things like: "I'm your King! I'm your Leader! I'm the Boss!"

And, Jesus planned this parade to say, "I'm your King! I'm your Leader! Follow me!" But Jesus did not plan a normal parade, not like other Kings. First of all, instead of riding in on a big beautiful horse, what did he ride? A young donkey. What was he trying to say by riding on a young donkey? Donkeys were for the poor, the needy. Big beautiful horses were for the rich and famous. Jesus was saying, "I'm a King, but I am a humble King, for everyone, especially the poor and needy."

Normally when a king rode into Jerusalem in a parade, the soldiers and the rich and powerful lined up on the streets. Who lined up for Jesus' parade? His disciples who were mostly poor fishermen, or disrespected tax collectors, or people he had healed from being blind or sick or crippled. People who had been deeply changed, whose lives had been transformed by Jesus' ministry. People who were terrible sinners; who had been forgiven and had their lives restored.

Most of Jesus' disciples and followers were people who had been living a difficult life. Jesus was saying, "Yes I am the King. But I'm not a normal king. I'm

here to serve everyone, and especially the people in need, the ones normally left out. I'm here to love my neighbors, all of them, especially the needy."

Jesus had been saying this in his teaching; in his sermons. But today, he acted it out. He demonstrated through this Palm Sunday parade, that he is our King, our Leader, our Savior.

But Jesus is clearly not a normal King, or a normal Leader. Did you hear that loud and clear through this weird parade? Is Jesus a normal king? **NO!**

But is Jesus your king and my king? **YES!**

Adult Sermon:

Most of the time, our actions speak louder than our words. Words can help. Often words and actions speaking in harmony can be most helpful. But words without action, most of the time – not very impressive or impactful.

For me, that's what Holy Week is all about. Why don't we just carefully explain with words, exactly **who** Jesus is, and **why** he came, and **why** he suffered and died? And explain who we are, or should be as Jesus' followers?

It's one thing to hear words. It's another thing, and often much more powerful thing, to act them out.

That's why we do sacramental things like communion and baptism. Eating and drinking Christ's "body and blood;" having water poured over our heads; these actions can have a much deeper impact than just saying the "right" words.

Having a Palm Sunday parade, literally. Sharing a meal together on Maundy Thursday, and washing one another's feet. And then, stripping the altar. Walking a journey similar to the one Jesus walked on the way to the cross, our Stations of the Cross, with creative paintings, playing music, doing dramatic skits.

All these are actions engage us in the journey to the cross, on a deeper level. We do all of these actions because often they can speak to us on a much deeper level than just words.

That's why we do Holy Week, to experience Jesus' journey and the journey of the first disciples on a much deeper level.

In the past, we used to read the whole Holy Week story on Palm Sunday, the last supper story, the foot washing story, the arrest and trial story, the crucifixion story, the whole story until Jesus was placed in the tomb. But more and more liturgical churches are no longer doing that.

Now, on Palm Sunday, we focus on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the parade. But we wait until Thursday to address the Last Supper and foot washing. And Friday we walk the Stations of the Cross and contemplate Jesus' tragic journey to Golgotha. We don't just read about these transformative events; we act them out.

When we think about, when we act out and try to visualize, what the Palm Sunday experience was really about, we "hear" it on a deeper level. We hear what Jesus meant when he declared by his actions, "Yes, I am a King, processing into Jerusalem. But, I am not a normal King. These people who have followed me as disciples, fishermen, tax collectors; and all these who have joined my followers, the poor, the crippled, widows, those who have suffered from mentally illness, and many of the working people, and even some of the elite, have heard my message on a deeper, more tangible level. These are my people, my family. And I am their **King!** I have come to bring life and peace to them, and to all God's children."

That's what Jesus was trying to say. Not just with words, but with actions, public demonstrations.

Notice at the end of our Gospel Reading, the Pharisees, the religious elite, were deeply disturbed by the response of the people to this parade. No longer was Jesus just their "spiritual or religious leader." They were now, with shouts and songs of praise and the waving of palms, making him their "King." They were literally following him, not just with their spiritual beliefs, but with their lives. They were following his Way.

The same is true for us today. We can say we are "Christians," or "Episcopalian Christians," or "Reconcilers." We can regularly attend Sunday worship. But our actions during the week, speak much louder than our words, when we recite our liturgy.

We can say we are Christians, that we believe in, and love Jesus, as our Lord and Savior. But unless we join his parade. Unless we literally follow his Way of radical love, who is really our King? Who or what are we really following?

Jesus is our King. But he's not a normal king. His actions, his active love make that loud and clear. We need to do more than just listen to stories about Jesus. We need to literally follow him, to walk the Jesus Way.

I hope you will walk with us on this Holy Week journey, so that you may truly experience and have a deeper understanding of what it really means to walk the Jesus Way.

Amen.