

Palm Sunday's Sermon

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

March 24, 2024

The Reverend David E. Fox

Palm Sunday (Year B) 2024
Mark 11.1-11

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

It's Palm Sunday. We've waved our palms and marched them in. We do it every year, the Sunday before Easter. We hear the same story, sometimes from different writers, but still pretty much the same things are said. Jesus is headed into town, why? Well, to die. Even after hearing this story time and time again, something new strikes me each time. Jesus and his disciples were outside of the Mount of Olives and Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead, to a village, to retrieve a colt. He gave them instructions on what to do and to say, and everything worked out fine in getting the colt.

There is a detail that I left out that I want to dig deeper into, and that is the fact that this colt was a colt that had never been ridden. Either Jesus is being brave in this moment of riding on an unriden colt, or there is something more here than what meets the eye. An untrained donkey is going to bring Jesus, the savior of the world, all while the world is crying out Hosanna – "Save us." This word can be an acclamation of joy, yet here it is literally Jesus' followers shouting out "Save, now."

This unqualified donkey steadily saunters the Savior to where He will take the seat of glory. And so my message for you today, sisters and brothers, is that Christ does not choose the qualified, the trained, the well-suited, rather Christ chooses the lowliest of creatures to help bring in God's reign.

We, Christians, like to make all kinds of excuses on why we don't share Jesus the Christ with our family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. In fact Lutheran Pastors, according to the Alban Institute, are known for nurturing people already in the faith, but lack skills in evangelizing – telling folks who aren't connected with a worshipping community, about Jesus. It's not just a person in the pew problem, it's a world problem. The only way to point people to Jesus is to tell people about Jesus.

In a book that I read for my ELCA Coaching Level 2 course, titled *Faith Forming Faith: Bringing New Christians to Baptism and Beyond*, it shows a model for evangelizing the community around our congregation. One of the discoveries that this church made was that a devastating majority of the people in their community were not actively a part of any type of faith community, something like 90%. We could say that everyone we know is Christian, but we really aren't that naïve to believe that, are we?

When I've told people about Gloria Dei and invited them to worship Jesus here, I often get, "Well, I'm Baptist" or fill in the denomination. A good friend of mine said to follow up with the question, "What's your pastor's name?" As any active churchgoer knows their pastor's name. Many of these folks who claim a denomination have been estranged from their worshipping community.

Folks, I'm here to tell you that an isolated Christian is a paralyzed Christian. Christians cannot grow in their faith sitting on the couch on Sunday morning with their hands in the Cheetos bowl. Isolated Christians need to be reintroduced to Jesus, His Church, and His love for them; they need to know that God deserves their worship.

Trust me when I say that many of our young people in grade school have no clue what church is. Even with having a school as our biggest ministry here at Gloria Dei, many of our students do not belong to a community of faith. We no longer have the excuse that everyone has their own worshipping community of which they are actively a part. And we no longer have the excuse that we don't know enough to go out and evangelize the world.

Brothers and Sisters, if that untrained colt could steadily saunter the Savior to where He will take the seat of glory, then we too can bring Jesus before the world. Christ does not choose the qualified, the trained, the well-suited; rather Christ chooses the lowliest of creatures to help bring in God's reign.

That colt that sauntered in the Savior had no training and yet Jesus chose this colt to be a part of God's plan of salvation. As this colt was draped with cloaks, as the Savior of the Lord mounted it's back, as many people spread their cloaks and leafy branches on the road, this colt could have been startled at all of the attention. The colt could have become scared from the attention. He could have had his ego to swell, thinking that all of this pageantry was for him. As the people began to shout "Hosanna in the highest heaven," this untrained animal could have turned in the other direction, leaving Jesus to be ushered in on foot. However, this faithful, unqualified colt takes Jesus all the way to Jerusalem.

This was what this colt was made for, to usher Jesus into Jerusalem, the place where he will be betrayed, tried, crucified, where he will die on that cross, be buried in a borrowed tomb, and then on the third day be raised. This colt was part of the plan from the very beginning. Christ does not choose the qualified, the trained, the well-suited, rather Christ chooses the lowliest of creatures to help bring in God's reign.

Through the waters of baptism, you were named and claimed by God; and you are a part of God's plan to evangelize the world. We were not baptized into God's family to sit around doing nothing, waiting for death or Jesus' return, whichever comes first. No, we are commanded by Jesus to go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We are commanded to love God with all of our being and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are instructed to care for the orphans and widows. We are advised to feed the hungry, cloth the naked, visit the imprisoned, welcome the stranger. We are shown over and over throughout Scripture that Christ does not choose the qualified, the trained, the well-suited, rather Christ chooses the lowliest of creatures to help bring in God's reign.

We are the normal Nicoles and the plain Patricks that have been a part of God's plan from the very beginning, to go out and tell the world about Jesus – to carry Christ out to our neighbors, without fear and without our egos swelling – to listen, to learn, to make a friend, to be a friend, to point that friend to Jesus, to invite that friend to become something much larger than themselves.

Sisters and brothers, we may not have any degrees or certificates. We may not have any letters after our name. We may not have the training hours one might need to complete before getting the go-ahead. However, we were chosen by Christ – Remember, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” – chosen to go out and show the world Jesus. No excuses. The Kingdom of God is at hand. You already carry Jesus in your hearts, now it's time to steadily saunter Jesus into the hearts of our neighbors, coworkers, classmates, family, friends, and yes, even our enemies. God does not choose the qualified. He chooses you, and he chooses me.