



Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup>  
Palm Sunday  
Matthew 21:1-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29  
Rev. Emily Williams Guffey

WELCOME TO PALM SUNDAY!

This has got to be the most disorienting Palm Sunday since the very first one when Jesus entered Jerusalem. In Matthew's telling of that story, somehow Jesus enters the city riding both a donkey and a colt which may be a bit confusing in itself. *But what we hear very clearly is that Jesus enters a city that is in turmoil.*

Those words strike me today more precisely than they have in previous years.

In all of my years celebrating Palm Sunday, I, like you, have relished the festive adornment of our church, our beautiful sanctuary with palms all over the place! I have relished sitting down together and weaving those palms into crosses that I then hold onto the whole rest of the year...until the night before the next Ash Wednesday when we gather to burn those crosses into ashes. With these ashes we mark one another that we are made of dust and to dust we shall return.

It is painful to be living in the absence of opportunity to gather together in person today. I know that and I feel that.

*And it is within that context that even more words jumped out to me from Matthew today.* I noticed, in particular, the gestures and reactions of those who gathered around Jesus that day in Jerusalem. They grabbed branches off the trees. They picked up branches laying on the ground. They took their coats off their backs. And they laid all of these down ahead of where Jesus would then ride.

*Why did they do that?*

They did that as a show of respect. They did that as an acknowledgement of His power. It was also a gesture of hope. For, in Him, they saw a prophet. In Him they saw glimpses of the living God. In Him they saw glimpses of the life that upends death...not death that upends life!

*And...that is where they put their hearts.* That is how they, with all of their being and whatever they had around them, acknowledged Jesus. They acknowledged that power and that hope with all the respect and honor they could muster.

Christ Church Detroit  
960 East Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, MI 48207  
313-259-6688 | [www.christcd.org](http://www.christcd.org)

At the same time there was another entering Jerusalem that day: Pontius Pilate, the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judaea. He was coming from the other direction into the city, his mission being to control the crowds who were there gathering for the Jewish celebration of Passover. We can imagine that Pontius Pilate was on a high horse, with lots of armor, with many guards flanking him before and behind.

*In contrast, there was Jesus, riding on a donkey and/or a colt.*

Between these two spectacles, each person in Jerusalem had to decide:

*“What is important to me? In whom and through whom do I see life — life that upends death? Life that disrupts death. Life that overcomes death? In whom and through whom do I see the hope of everlasting life?”*

Those who grabbed whatever they could — branches, coats, garments — and put those before Jesus saw that hope...*in Him!*

Today we are in our homes. We are asked to find whatever we can around us and, more importantly, *within us* to show our hope in the resurrection. As we say in the Creed’s most powerful words: *We look for the resurrection of the dead.* That is what we do.

Our challenge in this time of physical separation is to answer these questions:

*What gestures, what artifacts, what items, what actions can each of us conjure up that would point to our looking for the resurrection of the dead, trusting in the resurrection, putting our hearts in the hope of the resurrection?*

I will share that, in my quest to answer these questions, my day has not started as I thought it would. Even the simple things seemed to elude me. (I know that is the understatement of understatements at this time in our city and in our country.)

I’ve been encouraging all of us to go outside in our yards and neighborhoods to find branches in preparation for Palm Sunday. My little boys, who are six and eight, are master branch finders. Every time we go outside, it is like their mission...to find branches. They are enchanted with them. They are fascinated by them. They can analyze their qualities of being long or short or twisted or straight. Branches are their thing.

So, as we set out today in our search, I thought: *My boys have got this!!*

But, no. They found themselves more interested in rocks...and in splashing rocks into puddles. I couldn’t think of any metaphors with rocks and Palm Sunday. The more I tried to pique the boys’ interest, the less they wanted to look for branches. The result was a meltdown and we had to come home. So, I went out again to our yard and trimmed some cedars and some pines that needed to be trimmed anyway. Here they are. They are as the best I can do.

Like me, maybe you also are having a day or a period of time when the simple things elude you. At such times, even the new normal is so hard to keep up with. Sometimes all we can do is do the best that we can. But, remember, we are together. The non-elusive, clear call is to offer ourselves to one another and...to God.

And, like the people of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, we need to continue to focus on those important questions:

*In whom do we put our trust? In whom and through whom do we see the hope of eternal life? How, together in spirit, do we look for the resurrection?*

**AMEN!**