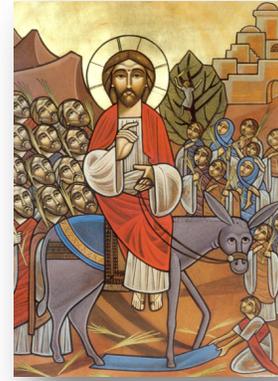


**Palm Sunday, March 29, 2026**  
**Matthew 21:1-11**

**The Absurdity of Palm Sunday**

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at  
 St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

*“When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city  
 was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’”*



Today, all around the world, Christians are waving palms with shouts of “Hosannah!” to welcome Jesus into the holy city of Jerusalem. The welcome may seem festive. However, the word ‘hosannah’ doesn’t mean “hooray!” The word doesn’t mean “we love you!” or “welcome King Jesus!” Hosannah is a demanding cry that means “save us!” “Save us now!” ...as if the crowd was welcoming a mighty cavalry. But there are no decked-out soldiers on fine steeds parading triumphantly through town. Paradoxically, Jesus, *our* savior, makes a humble entry into the great city as a pauper king riding on a tiny donkey.... without a legion in tow, or a sword in sight.

The whole scene seems a bit ludicrous. Aren’t kings supposed to wear fine clothes, ride on regal steeds, and be accompanied by a legion of shiny, well-armed soldiers? Yet Jesus, wearing the same dusty clothes and sandals that have accompanied him on his travels through town and countryside... bringing him to the gates of Jerusalem and into the very heart of imperial and religious power... this sunbaked teacher makes a triumphal entrance into the great city atop a humble donkey. It was a no frills, one-man parade that got some people stirred up with enthusiasm, while others were left scratching their heads, and still others were trying to figure out what to do about this troublemaker. On this Palm Sunday, we confront the absurdity of the gospel story that seeks to up end our understanding about who God is and what God wants for a people long caught up in misplaced loyalties... to earthly notions of wealth and power. What we did not see on that first Palm Sunday was an angry, judgmental God offering a display of brute force. Jesus was not leading a righteous army of soldiers sent to conquer the enemy. What we do see on display... is God’s way, the way of confrontational love that sought... not to tear down... but to witness to a power greater than any earthly power. That power, arriving in a humble package, would confront even the power of death... showing a lost people that there is a better way: the way of resurrection and life. This complicated and painful story is filled with promise. It is for us to follow Jesus through these final days, to immerse ourselves in the sacred story, and to let the experience do its work in us. Pain and suffering are woven into the story of resurrection and new life.

Pain, itself, is not to be sought after and is surely not to be glorified. The pain that comes with life can, indeed, be denied. But the raw truth of the days ahead... has the power to do deep work in us. We are invited to enter into the central story of our faith and explore the raw landscapes that lie ahead trusting that the experience will do its work in us.

One of my seminary teachers, whose life’s work was about prayer, healing and human wholeness, suggests that we entrust our pain to God... be it our own pain or the pain of others. We do this with the assurance of God’s loving guidance... and in faith that God desires our well-being. Flora

Wuellner writes, “Do not fear that God will allow you to become merely a helpless spectator of the world’s pain.” ...because there is so much good that God can accomplish using the raw materials of our life experiences. In her book, *Prayer, Stress, & Our Inner Wounds*, Wuellner offers these real-life examples of God’s transformative power bringing forth new life:

In the first story, we hear about a little girl who cried over the pain of animals. Wuellner writes that this sensitive little girl went to church asking God to turn her into someone who could help the world’s pain. “She did not know how that could be done, because she was very shy and timid.” That little girl grew up to become “a loving, compassionate psychologist and the director of a mental therapy home, reaching out with healing powers to [care for] the sick in heart and mind.”

In a second story, Wuellner shares the story of... “A young boy [who] wanted to spend his life sharing the good news of the transforming love of God. But he was so terrified of speaking in public that the first time he knew he had to make a five-minute speech, [the boy] lost five pounds in one week and could hardly sleep. Now he is a preacher of tremendous, loving power, and his words and books reach the hearts of thousands.”

In a third story, “A housewife, [who was] moved and sickened by the widespread hunger in the world, asked God to use her pain and her awareness. Within a few years she had become a strong political force in her church and her community, working with released power in joy and pain to alleviate the injustice and cruelty of hunger.”<sup>1</sup>

In God’s story, nothing is lost. All of life’s pain and difficult experiences can be transformed into new gifts. In God’s story, pain and death are not the end of the story. New life is forever seeking to be born.

God came to us in a most humble and unexpected way, born in stable in the backwater town of Bethlehem. In a mere three years since his baptism in the River Jordan, the story of Jesus’ ministry is approaching its climax. The God we know this week is a God who suffers with us and gives everything for us. In the Passion story, we are given an account of the very worst that this world has to offer. Death will shake us to our knees and shout “Wake up!” Death will grab us and ask two questions: What are you living for? ...and... Who are you living for?

When the late great Henri Nouwen reflected on the journey to the foot of the cross, he wrote: “There is never love without sorrow, never commitment without pain, never involvement without loss, never giving without suffering.” Still, we wrestle with the pain and complexity of Holy Week, a journey that will eventually, lead us to the place of death before a whole new day, and a new creation, dawns.

Holy week is a journey of faith and we have choices about how we make this journey. We can experience these holy days either as spectators... or as pilgrims who willingly walk with Jesus in his final hours... pilgrims who weep at the foot of the cross... pilgrims who open themselves to experience the profound grief and silence of Holy Saturday... pilgrims who will gather together on Easter Sunday to meeting Jesus on the other side of death and to celebrate the gift of resurrection.

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<sup>1</sup> Flora Slosson Wuellner, *Prayer, Stress, & Our Inner Wounds*, The Upper Room, Nashville, 1985, pg. 81.

As today's message began with absurdity, I would like to end this sermon with a quotation by Anthony Bloom, who was once the Orthodox Archbishop of London. Bloom was responding to a question about the existence of God. From a Christian perspective, Bloom says it well:

*"Of course the Christian God exists. [God] is so absurd, no one could have invented him."*

I pray you a most blessed Holy Week.

*Amen...*