

**Palm Sunday; April 10, 2021**

**Luke 19:29-40**

On May 13, 1969, 13 helicopters transported 89 men of C company to conduct a combat assault on a hill in Vietnam. As they arrived in the combat zone, the helicopters couldn't land. The soldiers had to jump out of the helicopters while still in the air 10 to 15 feet above the ground. Little did this small group of men know that they were jumping into an ambush. Little did they know that they were landing right next to 2,000 men of the enemy. 2 of the helicopters were almost immediately shot down. One of them crashed about 100 meters away from the medic of C Company. The medic's name was James McCloughan. Despite enemy gunfire coming in his direction, McCloughan ran the 100 meters to save one of the soldiers who laid in the open field after he had been severely wounded. He would later describe his rescue by saying: *"I weaved and sprinted through the fire and slid in next to him like I was sliding into second base."*

But this soldier would not be the last that this medic would save. He would lead two more American soldiers into the safety of a trench. During that rescue, he would be wounded by shrapnel from a rocket propelled grenade. He ignored a direct order to stay back. He would go four more times into the *"kill zone"* of that field to extract wounded men. Over the next two days, he would rescue and treat 10 more additional soldiers.

In a speech later in life he made the following comments: *"I followed the lead of my dad who told me as a small child, 'son if you're given a job to do, never do it half way. You do it to the best of your ability and carry it out to the end.'" Over the next two days, that would be exactly what he would do. In spite of being wounded himself, he refused to board the medevac to safety. He said that he would rather die on that battlefield those two days than to hear that any of his men would die because their medic was not there.*

Over the next 24 hours the men of that Company would continue to cover James so that he would do his job and save as many people that he could. He was not ready to give up on his men. He would hear the last words of 18, 19, 20 year old men take their last breath. Even though only 32 men survived at the end of those two days. James said: *"I wanted to save them all, but I couldn't."* Many did survive because of the courage of this young medic. When he was later asked in an interview to describe those two days, he said that *"they were the two worst days of my life."* On July 31, 2017, James McCloughan was awarded the highest honor that our country can award a person – The Medal of Honor.

As we watch Jesus ride into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, many would not know then that Jesus was about to face the worst days of his life this week. He did not have to parade into Jerusalem on that Sunday. He could have just come into Jerusalem as he had done many other times – quiet and not a whole lot of fanfare. He could have walked away. He could have hopped on the medivac helicopter and gotten out of the war zone. But he didn't. He loved this world too much. He loved listening to the words of his heavenly Father. He was given a job to do, and he would not do it half way. He would do it perfectly. He never hesitated even once.

I don't know if you are a big parade goer person. I'll have to admit it that I am not. I can only watch so many firetrucks, so many little scooters, or people sitting in cars and waving. When I was a kid, the candy was often the best thing about the parade. Don't take me wrong – I am not judging people who love parades. For the most part, I kind of look at parades and think: *If you've seen one parade, you've seen them all.* But if I were in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, I would want to have seen Jesus and his disciples entering into Jerusalem. This parade was a different parade. This parade was about Jesus entering the battlefield with Satan. Yet, many people who were watching this parade did not see the battlefield that laid ahead for Jesus. Four days from now, Jesus was going to be abandoned, betrayed, and all alone. But on this day, things would be different. On this day, the Son of God would receive the honor and praise that he deserved. This is the Son of God. This is the Messiah. If people would not have cried out, Jesus that the rocks would have to cry out as Jesus said: **"if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."**

**"They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Not many in Jerusalem knew that Jesus was about to face the greatest battle that this world would ever see. Jesus wanted his disciples to remember who he is."**

What a sight that must have been to see. But that's not why Jesus came into Jerusalem. He did not come to see people waving palm branches and laying down the cloaks on the road in front of him. He did not come to listen to the people shout their praises. He came into Jerusalem for one simple purpose. He came into Jerusalem to die. The Psalmist asked the question: **"Who is he, this King of glory?"** Palm Sunday answers that question.

Jesus came to be the kind of King that the world will never understand: *one who conquers his enemies by surrendering to them, one who crushes his opposition by letting it crush him.* This is the kind of King we have marching into battle as one of us and for all of us this week. This King is the only hope we have. This hope will not disappoint us. This hope will never fail us. When we fail to follow Jesus perfectly, his love and forgiveness is right there riding in on a donkey. His love is right there in the garden of Gethsemane. It's right there in Pilate's court and one a cross on Calvary. His love is right there in an empty tomb. Trust him. Thank him. Praise him. **"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"** Amen.