

Palm Sunday (the first one Pastor Adam's read about just a minute ago) - It is about the closest Jesus came to getting the treatment he deserved.

This is, after all, Jesus. Based on the words and actions of those who knew him, based on his own words and actions, as C.S. Lewis famously quipped, Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or he is Lord – the Son of God himself, the long-promised Messiah (or Christ). Jesus himself left no room for calling him just a nice guy, or a wise teacher.

This is Jesus, the Son of God and yet over the 33 years of his life on earth he was never really treated accordingly.

From the red carpets of Hollywood to the martial airs of *Hail the Chief*, even today we tend to recognize greatness with a display of grandeur, and yet when the greatest human to ever live, the very Son of God, made his rounds in Galilee and Judea 2000 years ago the grandeur was conspicuously missing.

Born in a stable and first greeted by blue-collar shepherds.

Raised in Nazareth, a little backwater town, not known for anything except its unexceptional-ness.

Sure, the crowds started forming when the miracles started happening but they never stuck around for long, and even when present they lacked the panache one would expect from the entourage of the Son of God.

Until this day, the day we call Palm Sunday...

It is about the closest Jesus came to getting the treatment he deserved.

Yes, his ride was far from the strutting war-horses and chariots of Rome. And, yes, the greeting seems rather impromptu. But at least the crowd seems to recognize the greatness of this man riding his borrowed colt.

They line his way with the shirts off their back (a symbol of respect) and hastily-cut palm branches (a symbol of an honored victor). The words they shouted were from a clearly Messianic Psalm (a song written almost a thousand years before Jesus came, a song of praise for the long-promised, eagerly-anticipated Savior of the World).

They shouted:

Hosanna! ("Save us!")

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! (meaning: "you are a blessing because you have come from God!")

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! (meaning: "You have come to fix what our sins broke, you have come to restore to greatness the people of God.")

Hosanna in the highest!

Finally, a bit of the recognition Jesus deserved.

And yet, how fleeting it was... Palm Sunday is, after all, the Sunday before what we call Good Friday – the day when Jesus died.

It was a greeting that was kind of like those palm branches they cut and lay in his path (or like these ones the kids brought today)... Today, like on that first Palm Sunday, they are alive and green, but if we just left these here tonight and came back in a couple days, what would we find? These same palms that are luscious and green today will be shriveled and dead by weeks end.

That's what we see on that first Palm Sunday. The Jerusalem crowds treated Jesus as a king on Sunday, but they would treat him as a common criminal by the end of the week. They showed him respect and honor today but by Friday they would curse and mock him.

And while I can't say for sure how many of the crowd this Sunday were in the mob yelling, "**Crucify him!**" just a few days later, I can say for sure that there were none who came to his defense, none that rallied to save him.

They treated him like a king on Sunday and abandoned him on Friday.

And it is so easy to look at the hot and cold nature of this crowd and wonder: how could they?

How can they seem so close to understanding who Jesus was, why he had come, and what he deserved on Sunday only to melt away by Friday?

How can they recognize Jesus as someone sent from the right hand of God himself, someone worth honoring and praising on Sunday only to keep their lips sealed on Friday?

Perhaps speaking a bit hyperbolically, Matthew tells us the whole city was thrown into a commotion on that day. Hyperbole or not, how can they flock to him by the thousands on Sunday only to abandon him to the last man by Friday?

How can they be so hot and then so cold?

How can they be so faith and praise-filled and then so faithless and sin-filled?

How could they?

Friends, how could we? ...

It is easy to see the foolish, heartbreaking inconsistency in the sins of others. It is much harder to see that same foolish, heartbreaking inconsistency in ourselves.

How can *they* seem so close to understanding who Jesus was, why he had come, and what he deserved only to melt away?

Friends, how could *you*?

Let's pick one thing: your daydreams.

Do your daydreams display an understanding of who Jesus is, why he came, and what he deserves? The simple fact is, understanding who Jesus is ought to completely redefine how you think about success and comfort and happiness – in short, all the things we tend to daydream about. Knowing Jesus ought to make what we dream about different from what the rest of the world dreams about and

hopes for – instead of the praise of others, we should dream about receiving the praise of our God; instead of a nicer home, the mansions of heaven; instead all the ways we could strike it rich here and now, all of the ways we could share the love of Jesus with the world around us.

Do the things you dream about reflect an understanding and application of who Jesus is, why he came, and what he deserves?

How could *they*? Friends, how could *you* who have access to the entire Word and counsel of God in the Bible at times seem so close to understanding who Jesus is, why he had come, and the implications that should have for every aspect of your life, starting with what you dream about, only to melt away into the world, so that your hopes and dreams are no different than theirs.

How can *they* recognize Jesus as someone sent from the right hand of God himself, someone worth honoring and praising on Sunday only to keep their lips sealed on Friday?

Friends, how could *you*?

How many of you, after walking out of here this morning will not read one more sentence from the Bible until you come back here in a week, or two, or three? And even if you do read and sing the praises of your God on a daily basis, praise him in the morning (or whenever you have your daily devotion) only to use your same mouth to sin against him later in the day?

How could *they*? Friends, how could you recognize Jesus as someone worth an hour of your honor and praise this morning only to dishonor him through your sin later in the day?

How can they be so hot and then so cold?

How can we be so hot and then so cold?

How can they be so faith and praise-filled and then so faithless and sin-filled?

How can we be so faith and praise-filled and then so faithless and sin-filled?

We all, every person in that crowd, every person in this room (including me!), are a little too much like these palms... alive and green one moment, wilting and dead the next. Our palms of praise and honor to Jesus, what he rightfully deserves from all of us, are lacking in quality and quantity, in longevity and consistency.

How could they? How could we? Maybe the biggest question today is why would He?

Make no mistake about it, Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen to him. He knew exactly what the Jerusalem crowds were going to do to him by the end of the week. Just a few days earlier he took the twelve aside and said, **“We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him.”**

Even though they finally were treating him like he deserved, Jesus knew how fickle the praise was. Luke adds a little detail to Palm Sunday that Mark left out: **As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but not it is hidden from your eyes.”** They may have been shouting hosanna, but it was lukewarm at best. So Jesus cried because he saw through their praise. He saw the lack of quality and quantity, of longevity and consistency.

And yet, knowing exactly what they were going to do to him, knowing exactly how fickle their praise was, knowing how quickly the palms would die, on he rides. He doesn't turn. He doesn't run away. He doesn't call down an army of angels to protect him. He doesn't call down fire from the sky to devour them.

He rides that colt straight to his death.

How could they? How could we? Why would he?!

Friends, did you know that Palm Sunday is the day that the Passover lamb was chosen?

Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover – that religious festival that reminded God's people of that last night their ancestors spent in Egypt, thousands of years earlier; that night when God told his people to paint the blood of a one-year old, blemish-free lamb on their door frames, and prepare a special meal to fill their stomachs because that night the blood of the lamb would save their lives and deliver them from slavery in Egypt.

Every year since then God's people had sacrificed lambs on the Passover to remember their God who saves lives and delivers from slavery.

Per God's instructions, that one year old, blemish free lamb was to be chosen by each family on the Sunday before the Passover. All around Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday families were bringing into the city one year old, blemish-free lambs destined to die so that God's people could remember their God who saves and delivers from slavery.

Per God's plan, on that same day, *the* blemish-free Lamb of God – Jesus - entered Jerusalem – the Lamb whose blood would be shed so that we could be saved from death and delivered from slavery to sin.

Why would Jesus do this?

This is how much your God loves you.

This week, starting today, was clearly planned by God down to the finest detail. You cannot read a single one of the accounts of Holy Week and not see that all of this happened exactly as God planned it.

Because whether the crowd understood it, or not, whether they meant it or not, he had come to answer the cry of “Hosanna!” He had come to save us.

Jesus rode into that city so that he could save you.

Yes, even today, our praise and worship of Jesus is like these palm branches, green today and dead tomorrow; it is lacking in quantity and quality, in longevity and consistency. BUT, that (our sinfulness) is exactly why he came. Our failures and our fickleness is exactly why he rode that colt to his death.

Because of Jesus, the Lamb of God, your God will not treat you as your sins deserve.

Because of Jesus, the Lamb of God, every sin is forgiven, every failure is washed away. In his innocent blood we have life and freedom.

This man riding his colt into the city is not a compulsive liar, nor a suicidal lunatic, he is our Lord carrying out his God-given rescue plan. He is the Son of God who has come to save us. Hosanna to the king!

Amen.