

Toward the Cross

The Sixth Week of Lent

I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly.

John 10:10

A party is thundering through the streets. People are singing, waving branches, and flinging clothing onto the road. A spontaneous parade has formed, and the crowd presses toward it. Everyone wants to either see it or join it. The city is heaving with visitors. People are asking what this revelry is about. Word is that someone great is coming into town. A miracle worker, a king, a savior.



The Sunday School images of Palm Sunday depict Jesus placidly riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, followed by an orderly line of disciples, the crowds, standing at a decent distance along the sides of the road, happily but calmly waving palm branches. Chances are, the scene was closer to pandemonium: noise and confusion and at least a little fear.

The Roman authorities feared uncontrolled rioting that would make them look weak. The Jewish authorities feared that Jesus' influence would lead to chaos, and that chaos would cause Rome to take away their power. Everyone in worldly authority was afraid of this party.

But did Jesus really come to bring a party? You bet! In the midst of all the grief that surrounded Jesus' passion—the threats to His life, His repeated declarations about His impending suffering and death—comes this sudden explosion of joy. And more, that Palm Sunday celebration was a pale precursor to the party to come. Why? Because Jesus came to dry tears and mend broken hearts and bring life. Yes, first would come His horrific death and the bleak hours thereafter, but then His resurrection would follow, and the life that resurrection would bring to all those who follow Him would add a whole new layer of wonder and glory to every single day.

Palm Sunday serves as a *Selah* in the midst of Lent, an opportunity to take a deep breath and steady ourselves before the horrors to come, an opportunity to remember that the miracle worker, the king, the savior *was* coming to town, *has* come to town, and now *lives* in town, in each of us. And that is worth celebrating.



What changes that Jesus might bring cause you to fear?

How is Jesus expressing His abundant life to you?

Exercise:

1. Lift this exercise up to the Lord, asking Him to highlight what He wants you to notice.
2. Read the passage to the right, stopping at any words or phrases that catch your attention. Sit with the word or phrase, meditating on it and asking God to show you why this word or phrase caught your attention. After you've meditated on the thing that caught your attention, continue reading the passage, stopping at any other words or phrases that strike you, and discussing with the Lord what you've noticed.
3. Take a few moments to sit quietly before moving on to the next step.
4. Slowly read the passage a second time, again pausing when something catches your attention. This time ask God to show you what He wants you to know or do in light of the word or phrase that you've noticed. Wait to hear what the Lord may put into your heart or mind. (You may sense a strong impression or just what seems to be a fleeting thought. Don't dismiss anything.)
5. Take a few moments to sit quietly before moving on to the next step.
6. Slowly read the passage a third time, just letting God's Word soak into you.
7. Finally, sit quietly for a bit, and allow God to continue to work in you.

¹The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the Lord anointed me
To bring good news to the humble;
He has sent me to bind up the
brokenhearted,
To proclaim release to captives
And freedom to prisoners;
²To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
³To grant those who mourn *in Zion*,
Giving them a garland instead of ashes,
The oil of gladness instead of mourning,
The cloak of praise instead of a disheartened
spirit.
So they will be called oaks of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord, that He may be
glorified.

Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV)