

John 12:23, 27-28a

Palm Sunday (Series A)

Lessons: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 27:11-66

From Palms and Praises to the Cross and Pain

March 29, 2026

Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

While we are using the “shorter”, alternate lesson for this day, the appointed Gospel reading for Palm Sunday or Passion Sunday is all of Matthew 26 and Matthew 27. There are readings appointed for each day of Holy Week, and these also tend to be longer readings from the Gospels. The chief Gospel reading for Good Friday is two chapters from the Gospel of John. There is much for us to read and contemplate during this week as we think of all that our Saviour has done for us and for our salvation.

All four of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—focus on one particular week of Jesus’ life, this week we call Holy Week, beginning from His triumphal entry that we remember today, and continuing until Easter Sunday. The events of this one week, this last week of our Lord’s earthly life, are recorded in Matthew chapters 21-28; Mark chapters 11-16; Luke 19-24 and John 12-21. Of the 3,779 verses in the Gospels, a total of 1,298 verses—a total of 34% of them—relate to our Lord’s passion. That would be like writing a 4 volume history of Canada from the beginning of exploration and settlement right up to the present, and devoting one whole volume to discussing only John A. McDonald.

The importance of this week can never be overstated, since the events from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday are the very heart and core of our hope. As Jesus Himself says in our text: ***for this purpose I have come to this hour.*** Jesus never hid His purpose from His disciples. He clearly told them what lay before Him. We are told in Matthew’s Gospel: ***as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”*** (Matthew 20:17-19 - ESV)

This week moves us from the palms and praises of the people of Jerusalem to the pain of the cross. Thankfully, it ends with the best news of all, as we come to the empty tomb, rejoicing in the good news that the Lord of Life has defeated sin, death and hell as He pays the price for our sins and wins the victory in His resurrection.

Everything about this week is caught in a conflict between triumph and tragedy. We began our service today with the palms and praises led by the children, as they were on that first Palm Sunday. We remember with joy that Jesus rode into Jerusalem in triumph. The palm branches were symbols of triumph and peace, a way of greeting some great person. Luke tells us: ***As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*** (Luke 19:37-38 - ESV) When some of the Pharisees in the crowd objected to this and said to Jesus: ***“Teacher, rebuke your disciples.”*** ***He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”*** (Luke 19:39-40 - ESV) Yes, the palms and praises of this day fit so well with the words of Jesus in our text: ***“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”***

Everything that we remember in this week is glorious, but not in the way that the world thinks of glory. To most people, glory is winning a gold medal in the Olympics. Glory is winning a Nobel Prize or an Oscar or a Canadian team winning the Stanley Cup. Glory is being recognized as a celebrity, as a success, as someone famous or powerful. Some churches only talk about glory, about all the good things that happen when you are a Christian. Even the disciples were often misled by this type of thinking. They had long waited for Jesus to reveal Himself as the messiah, convinced that when He did reveal His true glory He would reestablish the great earthly kingdom of David. They wanted to see Him

take control of an earthly kingdom. They wanted Him to free them from the Romans. They wanted to see glory in the sense of power and wealth and prestige. They wanted a glory that comes as people envy them because of the special relationship they had with the Messiah.

That view of glory seems to be in step with the palms and praises of this day. But Jesus did not come to Jerusalem to be crowned King of Israel. He did not come just to hear the praises of people. He did come to give His life as a ransom for many. He came to die, and He knew that was His purpose. He willingly accepted that this was the way of glory. Yes, the palms and praises seemed glorious. But in a few short days those shouts of praise would turn to incriminating cries, as the people cry, **“Crucify, crucify him!”** (Luke 23:21, ESV) The palm branches waved as He rode into Jerusalem would give way to the nails that would hold the palms of His hands to the cross.

Yet Jesus says that this is His hour of glory. Paul explained that in our Epistle lesson today: ***[Christ] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*** (Philippians 2:8-11 - ESV) The glory that Jesus sees as He moves from the palms and praises to the pain of the cross is the glory of our redemption. He sees the glory which comes out of the tragedy that will follow Palm Sunday. One of our great hymns says: *If Your beloved Son, O God, Had not to earth descended And in our mortal flesh and blood Had not sin's power ended, Then this poor, wretched soul of mine In hell eternally would pine Because of my transgression.* (LSB 568) Unless the Son of God leaves the glory of His heavenly home to suffer and die for us, we cannot be saved. The mission of Jesus Christ was not to establish an earthly kingdom. He did not come to receive the praises of men or to rule over them. He came to serve all of sinful humanity by giving His life for us on the cross. He came to save us from the fate of death and hell and bring us into the joy of life with Him forever. He will feel the burden of guilt and shame as He takes the sins of every man, woman and child upon Himself. He will suffer what we deserve. But He will do it, so that ***whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*** (John 3:16 - ESV)

That is why, even as we see our Saviour mocked, despised and humiliated on the cross, we can thank and praise our God for the glory that comes through the cross. Christ knew full well the struggle that lay before Him. He knew the pain and sorrow that He would have to endure. He also knew that it would appear that Satan had won in the battle between good and evil, as the triumphant king of Palm Sunday is deserted by His friends and dies a cruel death. But Christ could look beyond the events of Good Friday and see the glory that would result from His death for the sins of the world. He saw the crown that awaited Him as victor after His resurrection. He would establish a kingdom that would exist forever, a kingdom whose glory never would and never could be equalled. And Jesus knew the praise that would rise to heaven because of all the work of the Redeemer King who came to Jerusalem to give His life as a ransom for the world.

In the contrasting images between the Palm Sunday praises and the Scripture reading of His passion we remember all that our Saviour will endure before the week is finished. We remember that sin—and that includes our sin—is something terrible. Sin exacts a great price. Thankfully, we also remember the glory of our Saviour's victory, as the Lord who died rises again from the dead. We remember that we sing hosanna to the One who can save us; to the One who has saved us. We praise the One who will lead us through the contradiction of glory and suffering in this world to the unending, sure and certain glory of heaven.

Maybe that is the real benefit of the contrast we see today. It describes our life. So often we look for glory we cannot find in this world. But when things don't make sense, when we feel overwhelmed by the cares and sorrows of this world, we can still remember that God, in His mercy, lifts us beyond these things. We have the confidence that Isaiah spoke of in our Old Testament lesson today: ***“But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.”*** (Isaiah 50:7, ESV) Through suffering, the Son of God was glorified and is praised forevermore as the Saviour of the world. Through faith in Him, we look forward to a glory that can never perish, spoil or fade, and that will be ours because of the One who came to suffer, die, and rise for us. Amen.

