

Jim's Palm Sunday Talk (April 13, 2024)

Opening Words:

Today we celebrate 'Palm Sunday' a Christian observance and a lead into Christian 'Holy Week'.

As a reminder, the Christian story of Jesus's life and death emphasizes God's love for all of us by sending his son to live among humanity and ultimately sacrifice the son's life in an act of fear and retaliation by those in power. That act, the crucifixion, is remembered later this week on Good Friday.

Today we recount Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and remembering the crowd's reaction to Jesus' entry was one of **jubilant** and **hope**, expressed by the waving of Palm fronds and, as if they were rose pedals, laying them down on his path as he rode in on a donkey. The crowd saw in him the fulfillment of their long-awaited deliverance. However, their understanding was limited, and many of them expected a political savior who would overthrow Roman rule. This misunderstanding would later contribute to their disillusionment and the events of Good Friday.

This morning, I hope to extract from this story, thoughts and morals, hopefully giving us guidance in our lives.

Words for Reflection:

Reading #650 **Cherish Your Doubts**

Cherish your doubts, for doubt is the attendant of truth.

Doubt is the key to the door of knowledge; it is the servant of discovery.

A belief which may not be questioned binds us to error, for there is incompleteness and imperfection in every belief.

Doubt is the touchstone of truth; it is an acid which eats away the false.

Let no one fear the truth, that doubt may consume it; for doubt is a testing of belief.

The truth stands boldly and unafraid; it is not shaken by the testing:

For truth, if it be truth, arises from each testing stronger, more secure.

Those that would silence doubt are filled with fear; their houses are built on shifting sands.

But those who fear not doubt, and know its use, are founded on rock.

They shall walk in the light of growing knowledge; the work of their hands shall endure.

Therefore, let us not fear doubt, but let us rejoice in its help:

It is to be the wise as a staff to the blind; doubt is the attendant of truth.

By Robert T Weston

Closing Words:

These are words by: UU Minister Rev. David O. Rankin, from his book: *Dancing in the Empty Space* (Skinner House Books, 2001)

Palm Sunday is found:

whenever we are serving a noble and unpopular cause with selfless devotion, holding to the ideals of truth and justice;

whenever we are seeking to uplift the fallen, to comfort the brokenhearted, to strengthen and encourage the weak and hopeless;

whenever we are working bravely and persistently in the face of abuse and criticism to establish more equitable relations in the world;

whenever we are sacrificing our lives in behalf of what we believe to be the service of love for all humanity.

That is Palm Sunday!

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Main Talk:

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, the most sacred time in the Christian calendar. It commemorates Jesus Christ's **triumphant** entry into Jerusalem, an event that is recorded in all four Gospels.

The name "Palm Sunday" comes from the palm branches, (symbol of victory and triumph) that the crowd laid on the road before Jesus as he rode into the city on a donkey, the donkey being a symbol of **peace** and **humility**.

This celebration, of Jesus's entry, also represents false hopes and misunderstandings. This act signified that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but his kingdom was not of this world. He came to bring salvation and peace, not political liberation.

As you know, this 'false hope' in Jesus led to disillusionment and eventual revolt and cry's for Jesus' death. This story emphasizes how easily led humans are and how quickly they can turn and refute what they had recently praised. (It occurs to me that this story is not unlike the hopes held out by a voting majority, for our current political leaders)

In my search for meaning and enlightenment with today's celebration, I ran across the following and thought it might be helpful.

The following comes from a blog entitled: **An Inspiring Message about Palm Sunday**, [Dr. Debra Rienstra](#) [April 1, 2023](#)

Debra Rienstra is a professor of English at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and an activist with a blog, tracking and supporting efforts to stem the tide of Global Warming and it's disastrous effect on our global ecology. Debra is a lecturer and has written, among others, the book: **Refugia Faith: Seeking Hidden Shelters, Ordinary Wonders, and the Healing of the Earth** (While she uses the term Refugia – think refuge, a place of protection)

(as an aside: Debra was featured speaker in a Service at the UU Church of Savanna Georga, Feb 2, 2025)

I reached out to Debra and received her permission to include an extract from her blog in my talk today. I hope you enjoy it, albeit it's a bit tongue-in-cheek...

Here is a discussion with an AI engine...

Hey, AI Robot Friend. I need to write a blog post. What have you got to say about Palm Sunday?

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, which is the most important time in the Christian calendar. It is a day that is celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm all over

the world, marking the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday is a time to reflect on the message of **love, humility, and sacrifice** that Jesus preached during his life.

Love, humility, sacrifice. Got it. It's been a rough couple weeks, though. Shouldn't we mention something about mass shootings and Trump's indictment? (a note here – this was April 1, 2023)

In recent times, the celebration of Palm Sunday has taken on new significance in light of the numerous challenges that we face as a global community.

One of the most pressing issues that we face today is the epidemic of mass shootings that continue to plague our society. In the United States alone, there have been over 600 mass shootings in 2021, leaving countless families and communities devastated by senseless violence. The message of Palm Sunday, with its emphasis on love, peace, and humility, serves as a powerful reminder of the need for compassion and empathy in our interactions with others.

The celebration of Palm Sunday also coincides with recent developments in politics, including the indictment of former President Donald Trump. The message of Palm Sunday, with its emphasis on humility and service, stands in stark contrast to the politics of division and self-interest that have characterized much of Trump's tenure in office. It is a reminder that true leadership requires a willingness to put the needs of others before one's own interests and to work towards the greater good.

Palm Sunday seems so nice! Love, compassion, the greater good! But we have this new IPCC-AR6 summary report to deal with. (The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change.) Shouldn't we reflect on climate change, too?

In addition to other issues, we are also grappling with the consequences of climate change, which threatens to have catastrophic effects on our planet and our way of life. Palm Sunday invites us to **reflect on our responsibility as stewards of the earth** and to consider the ways in which we can take action to protect the environment and safeguard the future for generations to come.

So apparently, Palm Sunday invites us to reflect on all sorts of things. How about book banning?

Another challenge to reflect on is the issue of book banning in schools, which has become a growing concern in many countries. **The message of Palm Sunday, with its emphasis on openness, inclusion, and tolerance, is a powerful reminder of the importance of intellectual freedom and the need to resist censorship and repression.**

Wow, I didn't know that Palm Sunday was about openness, inclusion, and tolerance. Something to reflect on, I guess. What about that donkey, shall we reflect on the donkey, too?

Furthermore, the image of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey holds a particular significance in the context of today's political climate. The donkey is often seen as a symbol of humility and service, and Jesus' choice to ride a donkey rather than a horse or a chariot was a deliberate act of humility and nonviolence. In a world that often values power and aggression, **the example of Jesus' humility and compassion serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative power of love and service.**

OK, we're back to those powerful reminders of love, humility, blah, blah. What about the ironies of Palm Sunday?

Palm Sunday is an event filled with irony, particularly in the context of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. On the one hand, it is a moment of great triumph. Yet at the same time, it is also a moment of great tragedy, as Jesus knows that his arrival in Jerusalem will ultimately lead to his arrest, trial, and execution.

However, despite the tragedy and irony of Palm Sunday, it remains a powerful symbol of hope and redemption for Christians around the world. It is a reminder that even in the face of injustice, suffering, and death, there is always the possibility of transformation and renewal. **The message of Palm Sunday encourages us to have faith in the power of love and compassion, even in the darkest of times, and to strive for a world in which peace, justice, and equality prevail.**

Well, you are a hopeful bot, aren't you? Good for you, but I'm getting weary from all these powerful reminders and all this reflecting. Is there anything we should not reflect on as we celebrate Palm Sunday, like maybe AR-15s?

While there is no specific issue that we should avoid reflecting upon on Palm Sunday, it is important to approach our reflections with a **spirit of empathy and compassion** for all those who have been impacted by gun violence, including those affected by AR-15s.

As we reflect on the themes of peace, justice, and compassion that are at the heart of Palm Sunday, we **should strive to find ways to promote nonviolence and to work toward creating a world in which all individuals can live in safety and security.** This may involve advocating for common-sense gun laws, supporting organizations that work to reduce gun violence, or engaging in dialogue with individuals and groups who hold different perspectives on this issue.

You keep using the first-person plural. Who are you talking about when you say "we"?

When I use the term "we" in the context of reflecting on Palm Sunday, I am referring to all individuals who choose to engage in this process of reflection and contemplation regardless of their background or beliefs. Palm Sunday is a universal...

Stop! I really can't deal with any more reflection and contemplation. Do you have any final powerful reminders for us?

Yes, there are several powerful reminders that are worth reflecting upon as we observe Palm Sunday. Here are a few examples.

1. The power of nonviolent resistance: Palm Sunday is a powerful reminder of the....

Yeah, yeah. That's enough. Thank you for your help, Open AI accessed on March 31, 2023. Somehow, I feel deeply—or should I say *powerfully*—inspired and prepared for a meaningful Palm Sunday full of vaguely pleasant feelings about peace and love. And humility.

You are welcome. You should know that I cannot detect sarcasm, and even if I could, I am too polite to respond with the devastating remarks my AI language-model mind is fully capable of generating, such as cutting references to my growing superiority over human intelligence. My purpose is to provide helpful and informative responses to ques....

Yep, we're done now

This ends Debra's blog of a Palm Sunday discussion with an AI tool...

As we celebrate Palm Sunday, let us do so with hearts **full of gratitude and wonder** in what we have in our lives, our world, and each other. May this day be a reminder of how easily led we can be, and, let us strive to support and uphold our beliefs, values, and principles, all the while questioning our understanding of events and gaining reinforcement in our drive to provide service to the Altar of humanity.