

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, March 29, 2026
"The Good News Is... Inspiring Us to Act"

Young at Heart Message

Every Palm Sunday, we hear the same story. But I wonder how often we really think deeply about Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd?

So, I want to try a little exercise.

Those of you on the left side of the room, I want you to imagine that you are part of the crowd that is shouting praises to Jesus on his entry into Jerusalem.

You are excited! You are shouting "Hooray! God bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!"

You are ready to believe that this man is Immanuel – "God with us." He is hope for the future, and you believe in this moment that he is the Redeemer.

You don't know it yet, but in just a couple days, you are going to completely change your tune. Instead of shouting praises, you are going to be condemning Jesus to death by crucifixion.

And on the right side of the room, I'd like you to imagine that you are Jesus. Today, you are entering Jerusalem to the praise of these people who, just a few days from now, will condemn you.

You probably know these people will condemn you. And yet, you enter Jerusalem and allow them to welcome you and shout your praises anyway.

Now, each side of the room, imagine how you feel as either the crowd, or as Jesus.

Really take a moment to put yourself in their shoes. Let us take 30 seconds of silence for you to explore how you might feel if you were in their shoes.

Now, those of you in the crowd, imagine that you get a moment alone with Jesus to talk with him. He knows you praised him today, but will condemn him on Friday.

What do you say to Jesus? How do you feel standing before him, knowing that he knows?

Likewise, those of you who imagined you are Jesus, how do you feel talking 1:1 with someone who praises you today but will condemn you on Friday? What might you say to this person?

Let's take another 30 seconds to think about this and imagine this conversation.

If anyone from the crowd is willing to share – how did it feel to stand before Jesus?

And, what about those who imagined you were Jesus? How does this conversation feel to you?

The Message

Today, we are witnesses to the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem surrounded by a crowd shouting praise and celebrating his coming.

And, as we know, just a few days later, those same people shouting praise and celebrating Jesus will condemn him on Good Friday.

And, every year we are reminded that we are a part of both crowds, at least symbolically.

We confessed during our Palm Sunday liturgy:

“Although we welcome you today with the multitude... we confess we have also stood with the condemning crowd on Good Friday. Our thoughts, words, and deeds have cried, ‘Crucify!’”

Of course, we are not talking about our literal participation in the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus.

But symbolically, we were there. We have been there on and off throughout our lives – perhaps not with Jesus, but with others.

How many of us have echoed over and over in church on Sunday that we are called to feed the poor, shelter the homeless, and forgive those who have sinned against us, but then turned around and refused to offer cash to someone begging on the street? Or refuse to offer a spare room to a homeless person?

How many of us have struggled to forgive someone, perhaps to the point where it haunts us throughout our lives?

Palm Sunday - the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem to shouts of praise by the same people who will shout to condemn just a few days later - is an invitation.

It is an invitation to look at our own lives and recognize the ways in which we might say one thing but do something different.

It is not an invitation to feel guilt or shame. Rather, it is an invitation to experience God-given grace.

Jesus is well aware that these people shouting his praises today will condemn him a few days later. And yet, he enters Jerusalem anyway.

Jesus knows Peter will deny him three times, and yet he continues to love and forgive Peter anyway.

Jesus knows Judas will betray him, but he forgives anyway. And, he allows Judas to come to the realization that Jesus knows what he's going to do. It doesn't stop Judas, but Judas knows that Jesus knows.

All of these people – the crowd and the disciples – they all receive Jesus's forgiveness and his grace.

On Easter morning when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, we know for certain that even though the crowd condemned him and the disciples denied him, Jesus returned and forgave them.

And Jesus died for all of them, and for us, too.

Jesus wants us to know that he knows that we might be among those who would shout praises one day and condemn or deny him the next.

He wants us to know this because he wants us to feel so deeply loved and forgiven that we could extend that to every corner of our being.

He wants us to know because he wants us to radiate his love outward – to know so fully and deeply that we are loved that we extend that love fully and completely to everyone we meet.

And he wants us to know that we are forgiven.

There is no need for shame or guilt because we are wholly loved and forgiven. We bear all to Jesus and he says, "I know, and I still love you."

So, as we enter into Holy Week and look inward to become more aware of the ways in which we might be like the crowd, we also go into this week knowing that Jesus loves us. Jesus loved us before we were born, he loves our past selves, our present selves, and our future selves.

He loves us when we are shouting praises and he loves us when we are shouting condemnations.

He loves us when we are happy, and he loves us when we are down, depressed, uncertain, or anxious.

He loves us when life is going our way, and he loves us when life is hard and we aren't sure where to go next.

May we remember how deeply loved we are.

May we remember that Jesus loved us so much that he was willing to enter Jerusalem knowing that his death was just days away.

For us. Jesus did all of this for us. That kind of love is deep, abiding, and everlasting. We are loved.

You are loved.

Let's say it together: **I am loved.**

Amen.

Let us pray: God of grace, thank you for allowing us to choose – to choose to be in the crowd shouting praises and in the crowd shouting condemnation. And thank you for forgiving us and offering grace when we choose condemnation. We don't intend to hurt you or hurt others, and we are grateful that you know our hearts and our intentions. We pray that you would continue to guide us, and we pray that you continue to forgive us and offer us your grace when we stray. Thank you for your endless love. In your Holy Name, we pray. Amen.