

Series: Unlikely Encounters

**At the Gate**

Psalm 118:2-26, John 12:12-13

Sermon by Men's Minister Josh Brage

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, March 29, 2026

A reading from Psalm chapter 118, verses 24 through 26, and John chapter 12, verses 12 through 13: "The Lord has done it this very day. Let us rejoice today and be glad. Lord, save us. Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord, we bless you." "The next day, the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel,'" the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Josh: Great job, Augie. Great job. Way to kill it. He killed it. Good morning. I love Palm Sunday. Who else loves Palm Sunday? Yeah, I do. Love the energy. Love the energy in the room. Good morning. My name is Josh. I am so excited to preach. When the preaching schedule came out, I could not believe that they gave me Palm Sunday. I love, love Palm Sunday. I have been thinking about this day for a long time, so I am so excited. I love seeing these kids. I love these kids. Who knows? We have a lot of really great kids in this church. I love it. Some of them are mine. Some of them are mine, but I have noticed as I have gotten a little older, I do not know, maybe this happens to you too. I am a little more sentimental. Have you noticed that? Is that just I? I get a little misty in here when these kids come through. So glad you are here, so glad you are involved. One funny story; I was preparing last week. We were teaching. Anna and I were teaching upstairs in the kids' elementary space, and Palm Sunday came up. Sarah was like, "Hey, we are going to do this parade, and it is going to be great," and one of the kids goes, "Oh, Miss Sarah, Miss Sarah, I actually have my own palm branch. Can I bring it?" and she said, "Sure." He goes, "but I do not have enough for everybody else, so should I go get some more?" and Sarah said, "No, I have got enough." Some of you guys are raising really good church kids who have their own palm branches. Good job.

So, I have been so excited that I just want to dive right in. This is a powerful story, and I am so excited, so I think you'll forgive me if we just get ripping today. So put yourself back in Jerusalem for Passover week. That is the week that is launching right now. Passover week was a really big deal in Jerusalem. This was their number one top national festival. Think Christmas meets the Fourth of July and then double it. This is a really big holiday. People from all over the region would travel to Jerusalem to be in the city for this day. Hundreds of thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of new pilgrims would come to this tiny, cramped, ancient city for Passover week. It was full of celebration. It was a time when families would reconnect with each other for the year. Barbecues were going on. Lambs were being roasted. Picture this. Picture hundreds of thousands of people at a non-stop, week-long-plus party in Jerusalem. That is what is happening for Passover week. It was an exciting time. It was electric. Everybody was, just imagine all the sights and the smells, and there are songs everywhere. There are barbecues going on rooftops and on street corners. There are all kinds of activity and excitement, and right alongside all of this excitement, there is also increased tension on Passover week.

The Romans were there. The Romans are always there. They are always in charge of the city. They always are providing security, but especially on Passover week. Remember what Passover is. Passover is the celebration of the time that God delivered Israel from Egypt, and I am not sure there is anything that makes an occupying army more nervous than an entire city of people celebrating liberation. Think about that. Think about the tension in this city. We have celebration and swords. We have rotisserie lambs and clanging spears. We have families reuniting and soldiers on every street corner, making sure that nothing gets out of line. Can you feel the tension in Jerusalem for Passover?

Then, with all of that going on, the most controversial figure in the region, in the world, in history, decides to walk into this city. This is the guy that they have all been talking about for years. They have all been talking about this guy who is a Galilean. He is wandering around the wilderness. He is healing people. He is talking about a kingdom that is coming. He is casting out demons. Just last week, He raised a man from the dead, and Jesus is about to walk into this politically charged, electric moment. What in the world is about to happen? I love Palm Sunday, because I think Palm Sunday is actually a little bit overrated. We get that it sets the tone for Holy Week, but I think sometimes we move right past Palm Sunday and try to get to the good stuff, get to Good Friday, get to Easter, but if we do not get Palm Sunday, I am not sure we understand all that Holy Week has for us. So that is what I want us to do today, is to really focus on this story.

As Jesus approaches the city, He approaches the city with his disciples, and the people who have been talking about Him and arguing about Him, they see Him, and the crowd begins to murmur, and the crowd begins to erupt, and the crowd eventually charges out the city gates to welcome Jesus into the city. All of a sudden, palm branches arrive. Palm branches are a symbol of national identity, and the palm branches begin to be in the air, and all of a sudden, the chants of this crowd begin to rise, the chants of “Hosanna. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel.” These were very well-known words to them. Actually, these words come from a song that they all knew. It was a song that was sung at every major festival that they had, every holiday that they had. They knew the words of this song so well that when Jesus came, they erupted with language from Psalm 118: “Hosanna. Blessed is the King of Israel. Save us now. Bring us victory now.” This is a moment where they put all of their hopes into the arriving King Jesus.

Passover had trained them to notice what was going on in their world and to feel the ache of what was not right. Passover does two things. It celebrates liberation on one hand, and it reminds them that they are not free today. It does both, and so here on Palm Sunday, on this road to Jerusalem, all of their hosannas are pouring out to Him. “Everything that is wrong with the world, come and fix it.” That is their prayer, and I think that is our same prayer today. I think a lot of us, I know a lot of us, have walked into this room carrying something. We walk in, carrying light loads or heavy loads. We walk in carrying, I do not know, fear. There is a lot going on in this world right now. I might admit I am a little bit scared too. Some of us walk in carrying burdens, maybe in here marriages that are just barely hanging on. Some of us are carrying maybe things that are not that heavy, but maybe some of us instead are carrying that low-grade anxiety that the world is moving too fast, or that our kids are not being raised right, or that I might lose my job in five years. We are stressed. We feel it. We are anxious. We know that there are things in this world that just are not right, so whatever that is for you this morning, that is your hosanna.

That is what we are here this morning to lift to Jesus. It is not just a celebration, not just our kids that look so fun and so great, but actually to put our hopes and our fears and all of our desires onto King Jesus, because He is the king that is going to answer all of those hosannas. “Hosanna, fix now what is broken. Fix my marriage. Save my kids. Heal this country. Save our world. Stop this war.” This is the cry of hosanna on Palm Sunday. Do you feel it? Do you feel what is happening on Palm Sunday?

Jesus does a couple of things that we just can’t miss. The first thing that He does is to answer all of these prayers, and we can’t miss this about Palm Sunday, and we will not, but what we are going to do today is follow Jesus through the Palm Sunday parade, a little bit through the week, and where we are going to end up is actually Thursday night at the Last Supper, where all of this, everything He promises to do for us comes into focus. Are you with me?

So, the first thing we can’t miss about Palm Sunday, and I think we often do, is that Jesus did not just stumble into a parade. He did not. He did not. Actually, it seems like Jesus set this whole thing up. He and the Jewish authorities, they have been battling for months. The gospel of John in particular starts to raise the stakes quite a bit between the arguments He is having with them, that He raises a man from the dead, and their initial thought is, “We’ve got to kill this dude.” There is this oncoming confrontation, and it seems like in all of the gospels that pretty early on, Jesus sets his sight on Passover to initiate this confrontation. He chooses this week, which means He chose to spend Saturday night before the parade in Bethany with his friends. Casey, who was here last week, Casey did a great job with this story last week. Jesus chose to spend His last night outside of Jerusalem with His closest friends. Imagine Him hanging out with Lazarus at a party that was supposed to be his funeral. That is how Jesus chose to spend his Saturday night. Then Jesus gets up in the morning, and they all decide to head into Jerusalem together, and just imagine Jesus’ intentionality on a morning like this.

They get up from Bethany, and they head to Jerusalem. It is about an hour-long walk. It is not super, super far, and the trail goes up and over the Mount of Olives, and up on the top of Mount of Olives, it opens up on a beautiful view of the city of Jerusalem. It is one of the prettiest views in the ancient Near East today, and imagine that Jesus gets up to the top, and this is what scripture tells us. He gets up to the top, and He stops. He takes in the view of the city, and then what does He do? He sends for a donkey. Jesus is doing something on purpose. He did not just stumble into this parade. He is facilitating it. He is calling out details. He has intentionality. Actually, it seems like He has a donkey guy. He sends for the donkey, and He gets on the donkey, and He begins the descent into Jerusalem. We already told this story, but the crowd erupts. They come thronging to Him. “This is the guy. He is the one who is going to come and save us from everything that is wrong in this world.”

What is funny about this parade is that this is exactly what the Jewish authorities were scared of. This is the thing they did not want to have happen, a Messiah figure walking into Jerusalem and claiming to be king, and yet this is exactly what Jesus does. The Pharisees actually push through the crowd, and they say, “Jesus, Jesus, hey, guy on a donkey, you’ve got to stop this,” and Jesus turns and replies to them, “If I command them to be silent, the rocks will cry out.” What is Jesus doing on this donkey? The first thing He is doing is He is undeniably, confidently, without fail, claiming to be king. That is the first thing He is doing. He is throwing a parade in his own honor. He is marching into Jerusalem like a king would, except He is on a donkey.

Imagine with me for just a second. Imagine that the next president, let's not talk about this one, the next president decides to visit your kid's school. Imagine with me a very exciting day that is going to be a thrilling day for everybody involved, and they invite you, the parents, so you go, and everybody is excited. Maybe you all jam up in the cafeteria. They tell you all about what is going to happen, and somebody says, "Oh, here they come. Here they come," so everybody goes pouring out of the school, and what would you expect to see? I bet you would expect to see a helicopter, Marine One, coming and landing in the parking lot, or a motorcade. We have all seen that, a ton of limousines. We are not sure which one the president is in, but here they come, guys on motorcycles, flags are waving, but what if instead, that was not what you saw? What if instead what you saw pulling into the parking lot of the school was a sputtering 1995 Ford Taurus? You know the one. You know the green one, that Ford green. It is round. It looks like a Tylenol. Who had one? There are people in this room that had a Ford Taurus. You would expect to see a motorcade and an expression of power, but instead, what you see is an old used Ford Taurus and a guy just gets out wearing jeans. That is the picture of what is happening here. Jesus is showing up as king. He is claiming to be king. He is throwing a parade, but He is doing so in a subversive way.

John catches it. He points us to this verse in Zechariah: "See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey." Jesus is undeniably, unmistakably, deliberately claiming to be king, but his kingdom looks nothing like anything anyone expected. This is what is happening on Palm Sunday. Jesus is showing up victorious, but on a donkey. Do not miss this. He is not being subtle. He is staging a political moment to assert himself as king. This is not a man downplaying his authority. We actually get this during the rest of the week. He goes to the temple and clears everybody out. He marches in. He has confrontations with the authorities. He accepts the kingdom. He accepts gifts. This is not a man humble and shy. This actually looks like a king who is taking possession of his kingdom, but He is doing so in a different way than anybody had expected.

People expected something very specific. This was not the first time that they had a Palm Sunday-like parade. About 160 years before this moment, there was a different empire in charge of Jerusalem, the Greeks, and they were a very aggressive, very evil empire, and they were hell-bent on erasing Jewish identity. It seems like empires always want to do that, and so they took over Jerusalem, they desecrated the temple, they locked everybody down, and they tried to really clamp everything down, and Judas Maccabeus showed up. He was a Jew, and he led a Jewish revolt, and against impossible odds, Judas Maccabeus and his violent group of armed revolutionaries took back Jerusalem, and he marched into Jerusalem, most likely on a war horse. He had a sword in his hand for sure. He cleansed the temple, which meant wiping out all of the Greeks and reclaiming it for the Jewish people. This was only 160 years before. Everyone in this crowd, everyone in Jerusalem knew that story, and maybe that is what they were expecting Jesus to do, but Jesus does not do any of that. We do not see a horse. We see a donkey.

Here is what I keep coming back to. The crowd got the king part absolutely right. The crowd was right. Everything Jesus is doing is claiming to be king, and not just king. He is claiming to be Messiah. He is claiming every word of Psalm 118, which has been sung again and again in expectation of a coming Messiah that would fix the world. He accepts it. He claims it. He embodies it, but what they got wrong was what the kingdom would look like when it came. They missed that part.

The crowd did not get what He was doing. They wanted Him to conquer. His own disciples did not seem to get it, and if we are honest, I do not know if we do either. I think we are really quick, really quick to put all of our hopes and all of our fears onto the next person riding in on the white horse, the next election. I think so often we think that the problem with the world is that we do not have the right people in power, we do not have the right policies in place, or if we could just bomb the right people at the right time, things would get better. If we could just force the world to be the way it is supposed to be, everything would be right. We are like the crowd. We do this in our politics.

I think we do it in our personal lives too. All of us here have some sort of history with the Lord, some longer than others, and I bet your stories, if we took the microphone around, we would hear stories of victory in this room, stories of when God showed up at a particular time, in a particular way, and He moved in power on your behalf. He fixed something. There are stories in this room of great victories, when God showed up and did exactly what you needed Him to do at exactly the right time. I hope there are stories like that here, but there are also other stories. There are other stories here of the times when we pray so hard for His victory to come, and then all we do is wait. There are other stories in this room of us putting all of our expectations, all of our hopes onto the Lord for Him to show up at just the right time and just the right way, and yet He tarries, or maybe instead, suffering comes. Maybe suffering stays. We think that politics will fix it, or we think that Jesus is supposed to make our life just right and just perfect, and He is supposed to show up in just this way, but Jesus does not do that. He rides in on a donkey.

My wife and I know this feeling very closely right now. We are hoping and praying for God to move in our lives in a very specific way, and we have been praying for it for a while, and I can't stand up here today and tell you whether or not He is going to do anything like what we want Him to do. I hope He does. I can tell you that when He does, it is going to be better than anything we thought was possible. He does not show up on our timeline. He does not show up on our horse. He does not show up with a sword in hand or force behind Him. He shows up when He wants to and does what He wants to. He is king. He can do as He pleases. Do we get it? What we need is salvation. What we need is victory, but often it does not come the way we expect it to come. So how does it come? If Jesus is claiming to be king, He is claiming to be victorious, He is claiming to ride in on a donkey and solve all of our problems, how does He achieve victory? If it does not come through conquering, if it does not come when we want, if it does not come through power, then how does it come?

For that answer, we have to move past Palm Sunday. We have to move to Thursday night in the upper room. Jesus spends the rest of his week arguing in the temple with these Pharisees and Sadducees. They continually try to trap Him. They want to arrest Him. They want to put down this revolution that this guy is launching. They want to stop all of this from happening, and He does all of this, and then Thursday night approaches. Again, remember, it is Passover. The city is full of families that are gathering to celebrate Passover together, and Thursday night is the night. Thursday night is Passover dinner night, a very, very familiar meal. Jesus and his disciples, it seems like they were dodging the authorities all week, so I imagine that they ducked down a dark alley under the cover of night. They came up some back stairs somewhere to somebody's borrowed upper room, and there they had Passover dinner, a very familiar dinner. The food was all the same. Think about your mom's Christmas Eve meal. What is the best part of that meal? What is it? What is it for you? For my kids, it is the crescent rolls that come out of the fridge.

Think about that meal. It was very familiar. It is very cozy, and then you think about that moment maybe after. Maybe this is in your house, where grandpa sits down in the chair and opens what? The Night before Christmas book. Everything about this dinner was like that. Everything had meaning. The Passover dinner was more than a meal. It was this reenactment, this retelling of the Exodus story. They would read scripture. They would sing Psalms. Every piece of the meal had meaning and purpose, the bread and the wine, the lamb, the doorpost. Maybe a good project for you this Holy Week, remind yourselves of the Exodus story, and Jesus sits down and enjoys this meal with his friends, a meal that they had grown up having together, and just imagine what Jesus is going through as He sits down to celebrate the Passover. He looks around the room and probably smiles at the women maybe serving the meal. He nods to his friends, whom He loves. He laughs, but He also knows exactly what is about to happen. He sees Judas, who is about to betray Him. He knows it. He knows Judas has already put everything in motion. He looks around and sees his friends who all will betray Him. All will betray Him the very next night, and He sits, and He enjoys this Passover meal, but He does it fully knowing everything that is about to unfurl, unravel.

He enjoys Passover with his friends, and then at a certain moment, He takes the bread, and He lifts it up, and He says, probably in a loud voice, maybe He stood, I do not know what He did, but He says, "This is my body, broken for you." He takes a cup and raises it. He says, "This is My blood, shed for you." What is He doing? What is He doing, sitting at this Passover meal? I will tell you what He is not doing. He is not just enjoying another Passover meal. He is re-inaugurating this meal entirely. He is recreating the Passover supper around Himself. Every hope that Passover pointed to, every desire, every story that they told as a country, as a nation, as a people, He asserts and pulls onto Himself. "This is my body, broken for you." He takes it. He shows them that this is the way. What is He doing? He set all of this up, and here is why.

Jesus is launching a new Exodus. The thing that Passover pointed to was their need to be delivered again from Egypt. This time, Egypt looked like Rome, but Rome was never the problem, and here is what Jesus knew. Jesus knew Rome was never the problem. Rome was just a symptom of something bigger. They wanted Him to come in and throw out the Romans. He knew He needed to fix the very thing that fuels Rome itself. He came to conquer, not Rome, but conquer our actual enemies, the enemies that have been at work in our world since the Garden of Eden. These enemies are sin, the vile corruption of sin that grips our hearts, the disease that ensnares us and captures us. What Jesus is doing is not just throwing a new Exodus. He is reinventing it entirely. The greed that tears us apart, the diseases, the grave that comes too early, these are our enemies, not Rome, not that political party or that one, not that country or that one. The Exodus that He is about to lead goes so much deeper than Egypt and so much deeper than Roman occupation.

What Jesus knows is that to claim the victory that we really need, He is going to have to go to the cross. What Jesus is about to do is not to overthrow the Roman government. He is about to march directly into hell itself, and He is going to defeat once and for all sin, death, hell, and the grave, and walk right back out, holding the keys forever. When we think that He is going to just solve our world's problems, we think too small. What Jesus is claiming to be is our cosmic King forever. We think that we need a new something. We think we need a new government. We think we need a new thing, but actually what Jesus says is that you need salvation and salvation forever, and that is what I am here to provide. What Jesus

does on Good Friday is so much bigger. That is why He chose Passover to launch a new Exodus. “Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O grave, is your victory?”

So, this meal comes to a close, the Passover meal, and they do what every family does at the end of Passover. They sing. What do they sing? We know what they sing, because it is still what song they sing at Passover. They sing the Hallel. This is a group of Psalms, Psalm 113 to 118, and we know that the last song He would have sung with His disciples would have been Psalm 118. The Psalm they chanted at Him on Palm Sunday is now the same song that He sings with His closest friends on Thursday night. On Thursday, Jesus sings the song with His friends, knowing exactly who He is, and knowing exactly what is about to happen. Let’s hear a couple of lines from this song before we come to the table. Before Gethsemane, before the arrest, Jesus sings, “I will not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.” Before the trials, before the scourging, before the crown of thorns, He sings, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” He is saying this, knowing He has already been rejected. He knows everything that is about to happen. He just watched Judas slip out the back door, and He sings, “This is the day the Lord has made.” This in the late night. It is about to become Good Friday. “This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” He sings of joy. “For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame,” and finally, the last line of this Psalm, He sings with His friends, knowing exactly where He is going. He sings, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever.” His love endures forever. They sing this song, Jesus stands up, and He walks out to go to the Garden of Gethsemane, and now we come to that same table.

That same table that they celebrated that night, we get to partake of today. The crowd welcomed Him but did not understand Him. The disciples knew Him and abandoned Him. The leaders rejected Him, so there is only one question. Will you receive the King? This table is for those who receive Him and receive Him with joy. “On the night Christ Jesus was betrayed, He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way, after supper, He took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me,’ for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord’s death until He comes.’ Take a second. Take a deep breath. Come when you are ready. Gluten-free elements are here in the middle. Amen.

We sit on this side of Easter, but I want to fast forward really quickly to where this is all going. Revelation 7: “After this, I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count. Every tribe, every nation, all people, all languages, and they were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands, and they cried out in a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’” Jesus is victorious. This is the truth we will celebrate and marinate in all week. Please come back at 6.30 p.m., Good Friday service. It is going to be great. What a great time. I love Good Friday services, but then next Sunday morning, 6:00 a.m., for those who want to be in the Hub, and then 9:00 a.m. and 10:45 a.m. services. We would love to see you there.

Now, the benediction and a prayer: May we, Waterstone Church, may you, Waterstone Church, go lifting your hosannas to Him, knowing that this week proves that He is ultimately victorious forever. Go in peace this week, Waterstone. Go in victory, amen. Have a good week.

35:35 minutes

---

Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #933