

## **Not Settling for Palm Sunday**

John 12:12-32

Palm Sunday: March 20, 2016

Welcome/intro/vision

If you're new to church, today's a special day in the history of the church, today is Palm Sunday

And on this day we celebrate Jesus's last trip to the city of Jerusalem which is the last week of his life leading to his crucifixion and resurrection one week later

We're excited about Easter Sunday next week, please do join us and please do take the card under your seat and use it to invite a neighbor or co-worker or friend  
It's going to be a great celebration here on Easter Sunday.

And the thing of it is, Palm Sunday is a fairly raucous, celebratory event as well.

As we'll read about here in a moment, there's all kinds of fanfare and cheering and adulation and crowds and energy around Jesus's entry into Jerusalem

Now it is very appropriate that Palm Sunday is happening this weekend because in our own culture we've had our own emphatic celebration of sorts this week

This weekend the NCAA basketball tournament has tipped off, also known as the greatest sports weekend of the year!

And from Thursday at noon to the end of tonight there will be 48 basketball games played that all matter to some portion of the population somewhere, plus a couple of play-in games before that!

Productivity at work will take a massive nose-dive in many offices all across the country, EXCEPT, of course, at the offices of Chatham Community Church where we're always working hard for you!

Children will be ignored by parents, many of us will stay up past our bedtimes as a game involving teams that we don't care anything about develops into an epic quadruple-overtime battle til 2 am.

And what all 68 of these teams are vying for is One Shining Moment!

At the end of the tournament, the champion is crowned

And every year CBS plays this theme song called "One Shining Moment" with all their highlights from the tournament as they cut down the nets and celebrate their championship victory

The goal is to be the king of this bracket, to be able to say that they were the best team in the nation that year  
and to soak in the adoration of the crowd and thrill of victory

Now, whether you like college basketball or not, chances are in your world or sphere or profession or personal life, you've got some sort of a "One Shining Moment" equivalent

That there is some sort of situation or dream or turn of events or promotion or recognition or fortune or family experience that you might experience that would, in your own mind, be the pinnacle of success or a dream

For some of you, it might be to achieve a certain position or promotion at work  
for others it might be that your kids would be discovered or promoted,  
maybe you've always wanted to be a writer and your dream is that you'd be a celebrated author some day  
maybe your dream is just to be left alone to do whatever you want to do, and your one shining moment is the day that you get to retire and leave it all behind

For most of us, we've got some sort of a one shining moment equivalent that would be success or victory in some way

The experience that Jesus has today that we're going to look at to this point in his ministry looks exactly like his one shining moment.

What happens on this day 2,000 years ago looked by all accounts as if Jesus had conquered his bracket  
He'd defeated his enemies, and that he'd won the crowds and if he wanted it, he could have had the power to go with it as well

Palm Sunday LOOKED at the time as if it were Jesus's one shining moment—and yet what we're going to see is that Jesus refuses to settle for Palm Sunday.

He refuses to settle for everything that this world would have said was about as much as a poor Jewish carpenter traveling teacher could have expected or wanted from life in this world

He's going to see everything that's coming at him and he's going to say that as wonderful and glorious as this is, I'm refusing to settle for Palm Sunday, there's a bigger purpose for my life

And this morning, what this passage is going to challenge you and I both with is this very difficult question: where are you settling?

Where are you settling for Palm Sunday dreams?

Where are you settling for what the world would describe or say is wild success when Jesus says that there's something deeper, greater, more significant and more glorious ahead?

Jesus refuses to settle for Palm Sunday, it's the reason why we're here talking about him.

Today, I want to call all of us to refuse to settle for our own personal versions of Palm Sunday along with him.

Let's look at John chapter 12 today, if you're not familiar with the Bible there are 4 biographies of Jesus, each tell the same story from different perspectives

John is the most unique of the 4 and in chapter 12 starting in verse 12 he tells his account of Palm Sunday.

If you've got a Bible you can turn with me there, if you don't it'll be on the screen behind me and if you don't own a Bible, no Bible anywhere, free Bibles on the book table love for you to grab one for being here with us

John 12:12—going to read just a bit of Jesus's entry into Jerusalem:

***12 The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. 13 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!"***

***...19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"***

Okay, so if you're new to church you can see now why we call this Palm Sunday, waving palm branches was a way to welcome a king or a hero

A little bit of context: the largest Jewish festival of the year is Passover and Jesus has come into Jerusalem to celebrate Passover along with literally hundreds of thousands of other people

In fact, one ancient historian says that Jerusalem swelled to a population of 2,700,000 for the festival of the Passover

a number that would be nearly un-imaginable at a time when most of the population was rural and cities just weren't that big!

So there's this huge crowd in town for the Passover feast, the largest celebration on the Jewish calendar

And this crowd, at least a large number of them, LOVE Jesus, they're all about him. The only people who aren't happy about this are the Pharisees, John records their reaction here

The Pharisees were the religious rulers who have their own religious agendas that don't include Jesus

throughout the gospels are positioned against Jesus, they don't trust him and are concerned that the people of Israel are chasing after him as their king

And so they witness Jesus's one shining moment and they complain, "look, the whole world is going after Jesus!"

They've tried everything they knew to attempt to discredit Jesus and nothing has worked, he keeps getting more and more Facebook friends!

And so they utter this line about the whole world going after Jesus, which sets up the very next story which illustrates that they're absolutely correct:

***20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." 22 Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.***

So the Pharisees declare that the whole world has gone after Jesus, and the very next story we get from John is of these Greeks who are in town to worship and participate in the Passover who come and ask to see Jesus as well

And in most Bible translations, they'll put a stupid paragraph heading break between those two lines

But John wrote it that way ON PURPOSE! He's rolling over in his grave as these Bible translators have messed up his story!

So do me a favor, if you've got a Bible with you or when you get home, pull it out and I want EVERYONE to just cross out that stupid paragraph break and give John in his grave some peace!

That's not actual Scripture, that's just some dude messing up John's great writing!

The Greeks approach Philip perhaps in part because his name is a Greek-sounding name, even though he's actually Jewish

Philip gets Andrew, maybe for moral support, and they go to tell Jesus together

I've got 3 kids, and every so often they'll come up with a plan together and then come and tell me about it, trying to add a little more credibility by virtue of solidarity

We've been talking the past four weeks about how the work of Jesus and the mission that Jesus gave to his followers was to break through barriers of race and ethnicity particularly

Here, we see it in his own ministry. These Greeks are likely God-fearers, and they want to see Jesus, a Jewish roving teacher

Jesus has, indeed, come to break through barriers and here it's happening! And John highlights here in this pivotal moment in Jesus's life that it's not just the Jews who are affected by Jesus

Jesus's ministry has touched the lives of people who are outside Judaism who have heard about him and want to meet him, they want to see him!

Jesus's message and his ministry is already touching lives and communities and bringing people together around himself who have been alienated from each other for centuries.

Jesus, this is awesome! This is your one shining moment!

There's something for everyone!

the conservatives are excited because here is the king who has come to be the long-awaited new king of Israel

who might be the answer to their prayers to deliver them from the hated Roman army

The liberals love Jesus because look how inclusive he is! Look at how he's bringing all kinds of different people together!

The only people who are grumpy are the Pharisees, but you can't please all the people all the time and once Jesus gets into power they'll come around eventually

Jesus's poll numbers have never been higher and he's riding this wave into Jerusalem and the people far and wide have come to see him, worship him, entrust themselves to him

In his arena, in his sphere, as a Jewish teacher at this time, this is just about as good as it gets—he's got fame, and influence and people hanging on every word

And what I want to suggest to you this morning is if this had been you or me, we would have settled for Palm Sunday and the Palm Sunday trajectory.

We would have looked around, and known, just like Jesus knew, that this was about as good as it could possibly get

And we would have jumped on this swell of emotion and energy and ridden it out as long as we possibly could have

We would have found a way to leverage it, to treasure it, to enjoy it, to embrace it, and to keep it moving in the right direction!

And the right direction meant more of the same—more people, more influence, more authority, more glory

There's a straight line from where Jesus is here at Palm Sunday to the place where a teacher and revolutionary would want to go

If your dream is to climb the ladder at work, then Palm Sunday is like knocking your biggest project out of the park and everyone sees it, notices it, and celebrates it—you're clearly the next-in-line for the next big promotion!

If your dream is to become a published author of some sort, then Palm Sunday is like a blog post you write goes viral and gets seen by millions of people and picked up by a couple of major national news outlets

If your dream is for your kids to be discovered

Palm Sunday is like they land their first major role in a major production that's just one step away from Broadway or MIT or a Division 1 football scholarship

Doors are opening up, new horizons are opening up on Palm Sunday for fame and influence and authority

And all Jesus has to do is ride this trajectory out to achieve what most everyone around him would say was the ultimate goal, which was full religious and political authority in Israel

It would be the ultimate rags to riches story—carpenter boy from small-town, backwoods Nazareth becomes high priest and ruler over his entire nation

There's just one problem—while everyone else around him is delirious with anticipation about Jesus, Jesus himself is in a sober mood

And in answer to this request from the Greeks, with the party swirling all around him, Jesus starts talking about things dying

And we're going to skip a bit and come back to it on Good Friday, but as we look at Jesus's response to the whole world chasing after him, he's the only one who's not impressed

In fact, he says this:

***27 "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!"***

And if we'd been there, looking all around us, we would have been totally confused—what do you mean 'Jesus, why are you raining on your own parade??"

"What do you mean, your soul is troubled? What do you mean save you from this hour?"

Jesus, turn that frown upside down! This hour is AWESOME! Join the party! You're the guest of honor, we're all here celebrating you!

Right here, right now, we're in Jerusalem, you're riding this wave of unprecedented popularity and a ginormous following

And I mean if you're connected with God your Father, and if he's the one who sent you  
then isn't the Father already glorified here by this huge crowd shouting your praises?

But Jesus has already told his disciples that he's coming here for a different purpose.

He's come here to for this very hour. He's come to Jerusalem on a mission, to do something that no one else in his position of power and popularity would ever do

He's come to have nails pierce his wrists and his feet hammered together  
as he's hung up on a cross to slowly bleed out and eventually suffocate in one of the cruelest torture devices ever invented by human beings

And so imagine you're Jesus, right here in this moment—and no one gets what you've come to Jerusalem to do, no one understands it

And all around you are people who are clamoring for your attention, singing your praises

And right here, right now, temptation is SCREAMING at you to choose to settle for the path and trajectory of Palm Sunday rather than the path that leads to the cross.

Temptation cries out to choose the comfort and the energy and the power and all the obvious opportunities that Palm Sunday is opening up INSTEAD OF pain, misery, and agony of the cross

the siren call is to veer off course to a cheaper, quicker, less painful happy ending

Given those choices, which do you think you might choose? Position, authority, status, fame and influence OR pain, shame, agony, misery, and death?

Given those options, I think I would have settled for Palm Sunday, how about you?

And here's part of why this is so hard: there's nothing WRONG with Palm Sunday, right?

The crowds, the worshipers, the adulation, the joy, the celebration—this is all very good and very right and very appropriate!

But the cross is why he's come—it's what he KNOWS he's supposed to do!

So what does he do in the midst of the noise of the crowd and the siren call of the cheaper short-cut to a happy ending?

He does something that you and I in our own siren moments, can learn from. When we're looking at 2 paths

one that's a harder, more faithful road while the other is the cheap short cut to a fake happy ending, we can do what Jesus does here.

Jesus *repeats and recites his mission*. Re-focuses, re-centers on what he's come here to do. Out-loud. For everyone to hear. Whether they understand what the heck he's talking about or not.

"I'm here for this hour, for all that this hour entails, THIS is why I have come to earth.

I'm NOT HERE for cheap short cuts to cheap happy endings. I'm not here to win a popularity contest. I'm not here to establish some sort of political presence. I'm not HERE to SETTLE for Palm Sunday!"

He SAYS IT! OUT LOUD!

He knows EXACTLY what his mission is, he's crystal clear on it

and when he's likely tempted to settle for the Palm Sunday life and that trajectory

when there's another path that is without a doubt much easier and much less difficult presented to him to get a cheaper happy ending

He resets by re-stating what he's here to do, why he's on this earth, and what is mission and purpose is.

My friends, do you know why God has you here? Do you have a sense of what your purpose here is in line with who God has made you, where he has positioned you?

Have you put some time into thinking about and praying about what God's dream for you might be, why he's put you on this earth and what difference he's put you here to make?

Because every single one of us will at various points in our lives be tempted to settle for a false version of that glorious life.

Every single one of us will come to forks in the road  
and one of those forks will go in a direction that will call us to walk out and live out a cheaper knock-off *version* of what God has given us to do

And often it's less costly, often it promises faster returns on investment and less delayed gratification  
but it's also a cheaper and smaller version of the life God's given us to live  
and it makes US into cheaper and smaller versions of the men and women God has made us to be

Every one of us will be tempted to sell out in some way shape or form to a cheaper, easier, false version of the life we've been called to live by God.  
that are more likely to appeal to some of our most basic appetites like applause, approval, sex, money, power or just plain laziness!  
that if we pursue them will take us in the exact opposite direction from the life that we were actually made to live

And what happens often is that when that life or that option gets presented to us, it starts to get in our heads and hearts, doesn't it?

And we start to get a little turned around by it, we start to get caught up in it, we start to get enamored with it

And that's why what Jesus does here so instructive. Here, on Palm Sunday, when it's so very tempting to settle for the Palm Sunday trajectory and path of celebrity status turned into religious and political power  
he re-centers himself and re-focuses himself on his mission.

The mission he's been sent for trumps everything. The mission trumps everything.  
The mission trumps everything.

And it's absolute clarity around this mission that keeps Jesus on course to change the world forever rather than sell out for a temporary kingdom as a temporary king

And for you and for me, the same core thing is true:  
The mission God has given you trumps every other call to a cheaper life and a cheaper mission that you might be tempted to chase after

Some of us have no idea what God's mission is for us personally and individually, that just might be worth investing some time and energy and effort into to discover this spring

But to start with, what we all know is that all of us are here ***to love God and love and serve our neighbor.***

That's the first and second greatest command and mission that we're here on this earth to do—if you're a Jesus-follower here this morning, that's our mission, that's our mantra, that's what all of us are here on this earth to do

And each of us might will specific outworkings or applications of that mission in our lives at any given point or in different seasons it might look differently  
but fundamentally our mission here on this earth is to love God and love our neighbor

What that means is any purpose or experience or opportunity that would call you to sacrifice your integrity, that would call you to lie to other people  
that's a false mission, no matter what kind of gains it promises, a cheap substitute for a real life.

That's not your mission, that's not what you're here to do.

If there's a draw to abuse a substance and put something into your body that would feed an addiction

if you're a Christian the Scriptures say that our bodies are not our own, they've been given to us so that we might love God and serve our neighbors, not to use and abuse them

That's not your mission, that's not what you've been put here to do.

If there's an opportunity that would mean that you use people sexually, or for a financial profit, or for your own social status or for political gain

that's a false mission, a cheap substitute for why God has you on this earth, really, no matter what kinds of promises are attached to it

That's not your mission, that's not what you're here to do.

If you're a Jesus person here this morning, here's a starter kit for understanding our mission: ***we're here to love God and love our neighbor.***

That's our mission.

I'm here to love God! That means I don't love money more than God. That means I don't love my job more than God.

That means that I don't love success more than God. That means I don't love my free time more than I love God

That means I don't love this t.v. show or that internet site more than I love God

And that means if he's calling me to go in a DIFFERENT DIRECTION or even the OPPOSITE DIRECTION of that web site, this career path, or with my free time, then I choose God over that other thing

And then "I'm here to love my neighbor!"

That means my spouse. My kids. My co-workers. The people I bump into in a grocery store or who serve me my coffee at Starbucks. The people in my neighborhood.

Jesus has a much more particular sense of what that means for him

his trip to the cross is simply an expression of what it means for him to love God, glorify his Father as he says here, and to really and genuinely love his neighbors—all of us!

I believe that with some prayer and community and in an ongoing discernment kind of a way, we might all begin to have a sense of what OUR particular mission is here as well

But let's all start here because this is where Jesus starts and it's where we all start if we're Jesus people, everything else is just the particulars off of this: ***"I'm here to love God and love my neighbor."*** [repeat it with me?]

Now you might want to spend some time this week if you're willing to do this, fleshing out what it means for you in your context to love God and love your neighbor

And you might speak to some of the temptations that you know that you're battling right now

A number of years ago I was talking and praying with a married friend of mine who was battling attraction to a co-worker that he worked with

she was gifted and beautiful and his own marriage was in a hard spot and so we were talking and praying together about how to help him navigate the situation

And he started reciting this at work: on his way into work, while he was there, and on his way home: "I'm here to love my wife."

He was at work, and she wasn't anywhere around. But he was still there at work to love his wife there, in that place, that was his mission there at work

Having clarity around the mission to love his wife even and especially at work when she wasn't around helped him to follow through on the vows he'd made to his wife it kept him from selling out those vows for a cheaper relationship

This week, when you're sorely tempted to a lesser version of the life and mission God has given you to live out

When you're tempted to sell out, to give up, to chase after other lesser, cheaper dreams

I want to encourage you to say this out loud: I'm here to love God and love my neighbor

Getting absolute clarity on why we're here is so incredibly powerful when there's a giant swirl of other things going on all around us

All these emotions and temptations and fantasies and endorphins—it can kind of cast a bit of a spell over you, can't it?

You can get all hooked into the shallow promises of this other thing.

Jesus is right in the middle of that kind of a swirl

And what helps him to persevere and get past settling for a lesser life is having clarity on his mission

and then the presence of mind to recite it, out loud, at just the right time, to help break the spell

But Jesus has ALSO just prayed this little prayer to his Father, and that, too, is a significant part of breaking the spell and the draw of the Palm Sunday life

And what Jesus gets in this case is a very direct and deliberate response from God, here's what God speaks back to Jesus after Jesus says "Father, glorify your name"

***Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.***

***30 Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.***

True confessions: I, like some of you, am an external processor.

What that means is that sometimes I have to talk for a little while before I know what it is exactly is most important or how I'm really feeling or what I'm really thinking about something.

Some of you are like me, some of you are married to people like me, us verbal processors will be praying for the rest of you who have to put up with us

I don't think that Jesus was a verbal processor, but as he's continuing to talk here, we're getting deeper and deeper to the heart of the matter

A second ago, Jesus declared that he was here, at this hour, for this hour, that this was his mission

Here, we get a much deeper and more specific rationale for why he's going to go through with this very difficult and painful mission

And what we find is it's not all dandelions and bunnies and rainbows on the other side of this.

Jesus has come for judgment, to drive the prince of this world out. Satan has been mentioned a couple of times in the book of John

Whenever the Scriptures talk about Satan they don't mean a cute guy in red tights. They mean a source of lies and death and destruction, a cancer on God's good creation

Satan is a spiritual adversary that would corrupt and destroy any and all of God's good creation

Satan is set against human flourishing, set against your peace, set against your joy, set against your knowing the perfect love that you were designed to live on and run on

It turns out that Jesus isn't just laying his life down for us because he's a nice guy

Jesus lays his life down in order to win ultimate victory over a spiritual force and authority that must be conquered in order for God to reclaim what is rightfully his

God created this world, gave us dominion over it

And we handed that dominion over to Satan, we have given evil the authority that it did not have before we relinquished our God-sourced authority by handing it over to Satan

And since the rule of Satan came by a human being, so, too, it has to be won back by a human being—Jesus who is BOTH fully human as well as fully God

Jesus, in his humanness is going to go head-to-head with the evil one and re-win back authority and dominion over the world that was never his to begin with

Jesus is going to take back for humanity what humanity never should have given away in the first place

There's a spiritual battle and judgment going to be worked out at the cross and at the empty tomb, and Jesus is our great advocate going to work on our behalf

And then, part two here, is that if he is lifted up, he will draw all people to himself

And if you had been there and if I had been there, we would have pointed to the huge crowd of Jews AND to the Greeks who just rolled up and asked to see Jesus and said, "Jesus, that's already happening!"

You've already got a HUGE crowd of people here who love you and are drawn to you, isn't that enough?

To which the answer from Jesus would simply have been, "No. This is not enough."

He's not going to settle for Palm Sunday glory. There is a much greater glory that is waiting for him on the other side of the cross.

If he's willing to give up everything, he will gain everything.

He'll re-take the world back from the hands of the evil one who un-rightfully has authority over the world that was not his to begin with, it was God's to begin with

And after the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross it will be God's again

And if and as Jesus is lifted up on this cross, Jesus says that he will draw not just an enthusiastic Palm Sunday crowd

not just a couple thousand Jews alive at one time with a handful of Greeks sprinkled in among them

Jesus says that if he's lifted up, he'll draw all peoples to himself.

And one week from today, Easter Sunday 2,000 years later, will again be among the single largest global celebrations around the world

Next week, more people all over the globe, in almost every nation and almost every country, almost every culture, almost every language, will gather together to celebrate this man's resurrection

than will watch any sporting event or do almost anything

Jesus, the one who has come to bring all people together, to break down barriers between people, as he is lifted up he will and he does, indeed, draw all people to himself

Proving Jesus right, against all possible odds.

Jesus could have settled for Palm Sunday-type glory. Instead, he followed the call from his Father to Easter-glory

It was way harder, but it was ultimately more glorious, more fruitful, better lay down his life to re-claim the world and gather all people together

Two take-home questions for you this morning:

**1. *Where are you currently tempted toward or engaging in a lesser version of the life God would have you to live and the person that God would have you to be?***

**2. *How clear are you on the mission?***

- a. Some of us are very committed Jesus-followers but all of us can get caught up in the swirl of other things! Busyness, stress, fear of your own needs not getting met.
- b. Some of you, not Christian, or kind of Christian because you're in the south and an American so you think of yourself as a Christian, but there's no real daily following of Jesus in intentional ways

I tell you what—for this week, what if all of us, whether you're a Jesus person or not, what if all of us just test-drove his mission statement for us and experienced the difference it made in our lives?

This week, when you're stressed  
when you're tempted to do something that you know probably isn't right or healthy or good  
when you've got an option or opportunity on the table but something about it just doesn't quite sit right with you

What if you just repeated, out-loud: "I'm here to love God and to love my neighbor"—see if that helps to break some of the spell that these other things can sometimes cast over us

This week, as we prepare for Easter, we're celebrating Palm Sunday—and with the crowd we sing the praises of Jesus

But as we do so, we're celebrating the fact that Jesus didn't settle for the roar of the crowd on Palm Sunday  
but rather followed the will of his Father all the way to the cross and through to the empty tomb

He did not settle for cheap, short-cut happy endings but persevered in doing what the Father had called him to do

And this morning, the call on each of us is to follow Jesus in avoiding our own cheap short-cuts to a lesser life and becoming lesser men and women

And instead, holding onto our mission, we gather around Jesus who is lifted up on the cross, and we follow him into the life and the life-giving work he has for us to do.

Pray