

Advent Lutheran Church  
Choosing Jesus  
April 13, 2025  
Luke 19:28-44

Palm Sunday has arrived. Whether you have been counting down the days or only realized that today is Palm Sunday during the palm processional, you are now fully aware.

While biblical scholars rarely agree on much of anything, there is consensus that this marks the beginning of the final week of Jesus' earthly life.

And, it leads me to wonder about us and our choices. If we had been alive in the first century, each of us would have had to make a decision about whether to attend this parade based on what we knew about Jesus.

How would you have heard about it? After all,

- No one mailed personal invitations to likely attendees.
- No one e-mailed or texted Jesus' known followers.
- No one took out ads in the local newspaper or turned to social media to advertise this unique opportunity.

So those who chose to travel that day to be a part of this unique experience did so very intentionally. It makes me wonder what might have inspired you to participate. How committed would you have needed to be to following Jesus?

At this point, you may not be sure how you would respond to the opportunity to be a part of the parade. Rather than ask you to decide now, let me invite you to consider a framework for making your decision based on what we know of Jesus' ministry to this point. Nearly everything can be summarized with 4 Ps: priorities, parables, prayers, and proposal.

The first sermon series I preached after arriving as your Interim Pastor was called The Jesus Priorities. It was based on a book by the same name written by a Catholic lay person and educator.<sup>1</sup>

After studying the Gospels, Christopher Maricle counted the number of times Jesus did or taught about things. Based on the frequency of appearance in the Gospels, he suggests that Jesus had eight priorities: heal, love, pray, seek God's will, spread the word, treasure in heaven, children are precious, and live with humility.

Part of what makes Jesus' priorities so fascinating is that they not only shaped his life but also shape the lives of all who seek to follow Jesus.

While his priorities are helpful, alone they are inadequate for making a decision about whether you would have chosen to attend the Palm Sunday affair. So, in order to help you make a more educated choice let's consider Jesus' parables.

Did you know that more than one third of Jesus' teaching is in the form of parables? It was his favorite way to teach.

Parables are stories that grab your attention, and continue to hold it long after the story ends. Jesus' parables are focused on a single topic: the kingdom of God – which is now often referred to as the realm, reign, or kin-dom of God. Perhaps you recall some of the accounts that begin "the kingdom of God is like" . . . a mustard seed, treasure hidden in a field, or a small amount of yeast.

Some of Jesus' parables are widely known far beyond the church, including two we explored during Lent: the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan.

The content of these parables is timeless; they are just as important for present day followers of the Way of Jesus as they were for first century followers. They are simple yet can take a

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Maricle. *The Jesus Priorities: Eight Essential Habits* (Upper Room Books, 2007).

lifetime to understand. This is why they form yet another part of the decision-making matrix for the Palm Sunday parade.

While you continue pondering Jesus' parables, let me introduce you to our third "p" word: prayer. The Gospels portray Jesus as a person committed to a life of prayer, and as one who teaches others to pray. Jesus teaches about or models a life of prayer around thirty times in the Gospels. He expects that those who follow him will be known as people who pray.

Because Jesus was born and raised in a Jewish family, he grew up praying. During his ministry, he also crafted new prayers, including a model prayer which we call the Lord's Prayer. It is a prayer we pray together each time we gather for worship.

Jesus' life of prayer and teachings on prayer have to be among your key data points as you move toward making a decision about whether or not to turn out for the palm parade. I want to be sure you also weigh a final factor: his proposal.

While Jesus never called it his proposal, I think it is safe to assume he meant the Great Commandment as such. Remember that as someone who was raised a Jew, he knew all about God's commandments. There were, of course, the 10 Commandments. Additionally, there were 613 different rules within the Torah that were to be observed.

Jesus challenged this understanding by inviting his disciples to live by what is known today as the Greatest Commandment.

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."<sup>2</sup>

Christianity is all about loving God, and loving your neighbor as yourself – a lifelong lesson that also includes learning that

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 12:28-31.

everyone is your neighbor. To be a genuine follower of Jesus one must not only accept, but also embody his proposal.

But . . . I keep returning to the parade. Our parade this morning – the one that happened here in our sanctuary – was limited; it offered just enough visual impact to help you connect with the story. Some of you have been in congregations that take the palm processional to the next level. Rather than finding your seat when you arrive everyone remains outside – regardless of the weather. Worship begins as all of God’s people process into the sanctuary waving palm fronds.

These four points would almost be enough for me make a decision about whether I would participate in the parade. Before I ask if you'd be willing to add it to your calendar, let me give you some historical context for this event.

When we think of parades today, we tend to think of family friendly affairs designed to draw large crowds. The media covers them as feel-good events that contribute to community spirit or patriotic pride. In fact, just this week there has been discussion about a big military parade being planned for June in Washington D.C.<sup>3</sup>

We need to think of this parade differently. Before you decide to accept or reject your invitation to the Palm Sunday parade you need to know that it wasn’t the parade of the day. It was “the other parade.” A counter-parade.

The main parade – the one everyone was abuzz about – entered the city from the west. It featured “Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea and Samaria” at “the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers.” It was an impressive sight to behold, and a “demonstration of both Roman imperial power and Roman imperial theology.” As the military might entered the city onlookers would see troops, horses, helmets,

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<sup>3</sup> Rachel Raposas. “Donald Trump Is Planning Lavish Military Parade on His 79th Birthday,” April 8, 20225 - <https://people.com/donald-trump-planning-military-parade-on-birthday-reports-11711374>

weapons, and golden eagles atop poles; they would hear the beating of drums and marching of feet.<sup>4</sup>

Our parade – the Palm Sunday affair – was a complete contrast. It featured Jesus on a donkey and his disciples approaching Jerusalem from the opposite direction – from the east. It showcased the entry of a very different kind of king. Jesus' procession did not frighten anyone. The shouts of those who participated, however, led people to pause and consider who Jesus really was: Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"<sup>5</sup>

Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan put this in perspective:

"Pilate's procession embodied the power, glory and violence of the empire that ruled the world. Jesus' procession embodied an alternative vision, the kingdom of God."<sup>6</sup>

I can't take you back some 2000 years to give you the opportunity to choose which parade to attend or whether you would have stayed home.

Instead, as we enter Holy Week, I invite you to choose Jesus once again. To choose to spend some time this week reflecting on what you know of Jesus through your experiences of him and through his priorities, parables, prayers, and proposal. And, to choose to journey with Jesus throughout this week – all the way to the cross.

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan. *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus' Final Days in Jerusalem* (HarperOne, 2006), p.2-3.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 19:38.

<sup>6</sup> Borg and Crossan, p.4