

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Joining the Parade
March 29, 2026
Matthew 21:1-11

Scholars rarely agree on much of anything, but when it comes to Palm Sunday there is consensus that it marks the beginning of the final week of Jesus' earthly life.

If we had lived back then, we would have faced a decision: to join the parade or to stay home. And, our answer would have hinged on what we made of Jesus and his ministry up to this point.

We likely cannot imagine ourselves as participants in this one-of-a-kind celebration without a richer understanding of what this parade was all about.

Think about it . . . No one printed and mailed personal invitations with reply cards to likely attendees. No one sent an e-mail or an Evite or Punchbowl invitation to a list of Jesus' known followers. No one took out ads in the local newspaper or used paid ads on social media to attract interest.

So those who chose to travel that day and be a part of this unique experience did so very intentionally. It makes me wonder what might have inspired you to participate. Who would Jesus need to be to you? What would his ministry need to mean to you? How fully committed would you need to be to his message?

At this point, if you are honest with yourself, it is likely you are not sure how you would respond to the opportunity to be a part of the parade. So, rather than ask you to decide now, let me invite you to consider a framework for making your decision. What we know of Jesus' ministry to this point can be summarized using 4 Ps: priorities, parables, prayers, and proposal.

By sharing this I am also giving you a sneak peek at First Christian Church's coming attractions. After Easter we will begin a sermon series called The Jesus' Priorities. The idea for the series

comes from a book by the same name.¹ While not written by someone in a Disciples of Christ congregation, the author, Christopher Maricle, utilizes a very Disciples-like approach to determining what Jesus truly prioritized.

After studying the Gospels, he embarked on a detailed line by line consideration of how the Gospel writers depicted Jesus. Every time Jesus said or did something, he wrote it down. Next, he grouped like items together. Finally, he counted up the number of occurrences. Using this methodology, he proposes 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.

I'm fascinated by this not because it tells me more about what Jesus prioritized, but because it suggests what we who consider ourselves disciples of Christ should prioritize.

While his priorities are helpful, they are inadequate for making a decision about whether or not 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 1/3 of Jesus' recorded teaching is in the form of parables? It was his favorite way to teach.²

Parables are stories that grab your attention, and continue to hold it long after the story ends. Many include an unexpected twist; it is only after that surprise turn occurs that the primary meaning is revealed.

In the case of Jesus, most of his parables are about a single topic: the kingdom of God, which we now commonly refer to as the realm of God or the reign of God or the kin-dom of God. Such nuance is important for those of us living in the present and in a country without kings. And it is especially so on a weekend when millions of people all across the country, including here in

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

² Maxie Dunnam. *Twelve Parables of Jesus* (Abingdon Press, 2006), p.8.

downtown Fort Worth, gathered with a shared vision of ensuring America's future does not include kings.³

Jesus' parables compare God's realm to something common in this world. He chose everyday items that were familiar to his original audience. Perhaps you recall some of his teachings that begin "the kingdom of God is like" . . . a mustard seed⁴, treasure hidden in a field⁵, or a small amount of yeast⁶.

Some of Jesus' parables are so impactful that they are known even by those with no real connection to Christianity, including the Prodigal Son (or Sons)⁷ and the Good Samaritan⁸.

The content of these parables is timeless; they are just as important for present day disciples as they were for first century followers. They are very simple yet can take a lifetime to understand. This is why they form another part of the decision-making matrix for attending the original Palm Sunday parade.

While you continue weighing 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.⁹ 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 is known today as the Lord's Prayer or the Our Father. It is a prayer we pray each time we gather and one that many of you often recite on your own.

³ No Kings Day rallies were held across the United States on Saturday, March 28, 2026. For more information on visit the No Kings website, www.nokings.org

⁴ See Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32, and Luke 13:18-19.

⁵ See Matthew 13:44-46.

⁶ See Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21.

⁷ See Luke 15:11-32.

⁸ See Luke 10:25-37.

⁹ Maricle, p.8.

You'll find this prayer in Matthew and Luke.¹⁰ If you take time to study it, you'll find it is not about the afterlife or material success or even belief. It is, however, a prayer that invites us to reorient our lives. It is "a summary of what mattered most to Jesus."¹¹ And, when we pray this prayer, "we are praying for God's dream for the world."¹²

Jesus relies on prayer in the decisive moments in his earthly life. He prays at his baptism as his identity is revealed¹³, and then withdraws to quiet places when the crowds press in¹⁴. He spends the night in prayer before choosing the twelve¹⁵ and prays again at key turning points like Peter's confession¹⁶ and the transfiguration¹⁷.

When the stakes are highest, Jesus turns to prayer in the upper room¹⁸, in Gethsemane¹⁹, and even from the cross.²⁰ Again and again, Jesus shows that prayer grounds and guides his life.

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 one more 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.

¹⁰ Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4.

¹¹ Marcus Borg. *Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power – and How They Can Be Restored* (HarperOne, 2011), p.230.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Luke 3:21-22.

¹⁴ Mark 1:35 and Luke 5:15-16.

¹⁵ Luke 6:12-13.

¹⁶ Luke 9:18.

¹⁷ Luke 9:28-29.

¹⁸ John 17:1-26.

¹⁹ Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, and Luke 22:39-46.

²⁰ Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34, and Luke 23:34,46.

Jesus changes everything; he invites his disciples to live by what is known today by most as the Greatest Commandment. It is so central to Jesus that one New Testament scholar renamed it The Jesus Creed.²¹

'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."²²

Christianity is all about loving God, and loving your neighbor as yourself. This is a lifelong lesson that also includes learning that everyone is your neighbor. Jesus continues to invite people to accept his proposal.

But . . . I keep returning to the parade. Our parade this morning – the one that happened here in our sanctuary – was pretty basic. It offered the adults just enough visual impact to help you connect with the story. Now, I know that some of you have been in congregations that take the palm processional to the next level. At those services, everyone starts outside holding a palm branch. Worship begins as people of all ages process around the campus and into the sanctuary waving palm branches.

I don't know about you, but for me, just thinking about these four factors is enough to decide whether I'd have taken part in the parade. Before I ask you to consider putting it on your calendar, let me share a bit of historical context about the event.

When we think of parades today, we usually picture fun, family-friendly events that bring in large, diverse crowds. The media often presents them as feel-good occasions that help build community spirit.

We need to think of this parade differently. Before you decide to accept or reject your invitation to the Palm Sunday parade you

²¹ Scot McKnight. *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others* (Paraclete Press, 2004).

²² Mark 12:28-31.

need to know that it wasn't THE parade that was happening on that day. In fact, it was the OTHER 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.”²³ As the military might entered the city onlookers would see troops, horses, helmets, weapons, and golden eagles atop poles; they would hear the beating of drums and marching of feet.²⁴

Our parade – the Palm Sunday affair – was a total contrast. It featured Jesus on a donkey and his disciples approaching Jerusalem from the opposite direction – from the east. It is the first time in Matthew's gospel that Jesus has been associated with being or becoming a king. Jesus' procession would not frighten anyone. The shouts of those who were there were enough, however, to cause people to pause and consider who Jesus really was: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"²⁵

Scholars Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan capture the contrast well when they write,

“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.”²⁶

We can't go back 2,000 years to be part of the original story. We can, however, chose our place.

Will you join the parade? Will you follow Jesus to the cross? Will you trust him with whatever comes next? Amen.

²³ Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan. *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus' Final Days in Jerusalem* (HarperOne, 2006), p.2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3.

²⁵ Matthew 21:9.

²⁶ Borg and Crossan., p.4.