PREACHING & TEACHING

Palm Sunday Sermon

A Palm Sunday sermon framework built on the detail the palms usually hide: there were two processions into Jerusalem that week, entering from opposite sides, and only one of them had a donkey. Written for the Sunday most congregations treat as a warm-up to Easter.

20 min preached · 5 segments

Five movements, twenty minutes. Built around the second procession, which is the thing most Palm Sunday sermons never mention.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Palm Sunday is not a happy day with a sad ending attached. Preach it as the political act it was and the week that follows does not need explaining.
- If your service includes the palms and the children, that is the opening image you have been given. Use it rather than working around it.
- Publish by early March if you are releasing this as an episode. Palm Sunday searches peak weeks before the date.

01. The hook: the other procession

3 min

[open here - most of the room has never heard this]

There were almost certainly two processions into Jerusalem that week. Passover filled the city and Rome reinforced the garrison every year, so Pilate would have come in from the west with cavalry, standards and armour, as an annual demonstration of who was in charge.

And from the east, down the Mount of Olives, a man on a borrowed donkey with a crowd of provincials waving branches.

Once you see the two, the donkey stops being humble and starts being pointed. It is a parody of an imperial entry, staged deliberately, on the same day, in the same city.

02. The text

3 min

[Mark 11 or Zechariah 9 - Zechariah explains the donkey]

[read Mark 11:1-11, and Zechariah 9:9 if you have time for both]

Note how much staging there is. The colt is arranged in advance, with a password. This is not spontaneous enthusiasm. It is something he organised.

03. The tension: what the crowd wanted

4 min

[hosanna is not praise, it is a demand]

Hosanna does not mean hooray. It means save us, now. The crowd is not worshipping, it is petitioning, and what it wants is the other kind of king, the one who removes the garrison.

Which is why the same city that shouts this on Sunday can shout something else by Friday. Not because crowds are fickle, but because he did not do the thing they were asking for.

04. The turn

7 min

[the claim - and it is uncomfortable]

Mark ends the entry strangely. He goes into the temple, looks around at everything, and because it is late, leaves. No cleansing, no confrontation, not yet. He just looks, and goes.

[your material, 500 words - what it means to be welcomed by people who want something else from you]

05. The close

3 min

[do not jump to Easter - leave them in the week]

Resist finishing on Sunday's ending. The congregation will get there in a week. What they rarely get is a preacher willing to leave them standing in the middle of Holy Week with the branches still on the floor.

USAGE

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