



Sunday, April 13, 2025  
Luke 19:28-40 (Palm Sunday)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompanado

*Why?* A single three letter word that just might be the most powerful word in the world. And anyone who's ever spent time with a 10-year-old knows both how beautiful and aggravating it can be to be on the receiving end of their lawyer-like line of questioning.

Can we really blame them though? After all, children ask "why" questions as part of their natural curiosity and development of critical thinking skills. They're actively trying to understand the world around them, seeking reasons and explanations for things.

Sometimes their why questions are adorable and innocent, other times they're funny – and sometimes they're even a bit confrontational. *"Why this? Why that? Why do I have to do that? Why can't I have this? Why is it okay for you to say or do it but not me?"* And every once and awhile they're even a little intrusive, causing us to consider our own "why" question – *"why the heck would you ask me that?"*

But this isn't true just for children. We all ask "why" questions. The word "why" serves as a fundamental question that encourages exploration, understanding, and critical thinking. It prompts us to seek explanations, reasons, and justifications for actions, beliefs, or experiences. By asking "why," we can uncover deeper insights, solve problems, and gain a better understanding of the world around us. It's a simple word with profound implications for learning and discovery.

*Why is the time of day when traffic moves the slowest called "rush hour"? Why is abbreviated such a long word? Why do we park in a driveway and drive in a parkway? Why is lemon juice made with artificial flavor and dishwashing liquid made with real lemons? Why is a pizza box square when a pizza is round? Why does your nose run and your feet smell? Why does "slim chance" and "fat chance" have the same meaning? Why are some prayers answered, and others aren't?*

The bottom line is, we all have why questions, and depending on what's taking place in your life right now, "why", just might be the biggest question on your mind lately.

And in today's gospel from Luke the question of "why" and Jesus' answer to it captured me in a way I had never noticed before. On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus sends two of his disciples into a nearby village to retrieve a colt and he tells them, *"If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'"*

My friends, we're getting really close to the end now. For the past five weeks we've journeyed through this season of Lent alongside Jesus as he gradually gets closer and closer to the cross. And today, on Palm Sunday we remember and celebrate his triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem. I know that for many people, Palm Sunday tends to be a day of celebration filled with palm branches waving as the Gospel procession takes place to the joyful shouts of Hosanna.

But each year when Palm Sunday comes around, I don't exactly feel the joy and celebration of the people who Luke tells us spread their cloaks on the road in welcome and celebration. What I do feel, though, is a deep sense of confusion, guilt, and shame – and from deep within my soul, a single, heartbreaking question arises... *Why?*

I think it's fair to assume that you're familiar with this question; it's the anxious cry we express when we're confused by our circumstances, outraged by acts of violence or injustice, or simply feel completely out of control. *Why did the cancer come back? Why did I lose my job? Why is my child struggling so much? Why do I feel so alone? Why don't they love me anymore? Why can't I shake this addiction? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why did my loved one have to die?*

*Why* is the question that helps us articulate our deep desire to find meaning in meaningless events. *Why* helps us gain understanding and not feel quite so overwhelmed by circumstances beyond our control. And it's *this* very question that disturbs me each year when Palm Sunday rolls around. *Why does Jesus come when he knows the opposition that awaits him? Why do the same people whose joyous shouts of Hosanna, shift to a call for the Savior's crucifixion only a few days later? Why must Jesus die like this? Why the mockery and abuse? Why the nails and the cross? Why such an agonizing and shameful death? Why must it end this way?*

When I come face to face with these *why*'s, my human sinfulness and guilt rises to the surface, and I recognize the *why*'s confronting my own hypocrisy: *Why do I keep turning away from God? Why is my faithfulness so weak? Why are my earthly desires so important to me? Why isn't God enough?*

Now, I'm going to ask you to be patient and not to jump ahead just yet . . . for the moment at least, don't rush to get to Easter and the end of the story because it makes you feel good – or more likely, because it makes you feel



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uncomfortable to stay in this part of the story for too long. You're probably asking yourself, *why*, when we know the outcome of the story – why shouldn't we rush to get there?

Because perhaps, dwelling and pondering in the midst of the tension of the Palm Sunday story is actually good for us. Perhaps by staying here a little bit longer we might come to appreciate the true significance of the path that Jesus takes on our behalf in order to redeem and save us.

And I wonder where you might see *yourselves* in this story. Because *we're* fortunate enough to have the last 2000 plus years of hindsight, and it's easy to judge the characters in the story from a distance. But are we really so different from them? *How quickly does our faith fade when God doesn't deliver what we're expecting or when we expect it? How easily do we hesitate to follow Jesus when we realize the risks that come with being his disciple? How often do our self-serving desires lead us to deny Jesus and his claim on our lives?*

Today we begin our journey into Holy Week, and soon we'll set our feet on the road to the Last Supper, to the garden to pray, to the cross, and eventually to the tomb where the lifeless body of Jesus will lay. We may already know the ending, but I want you to continue pretending that you don't. The disciples didn't, and when Jesus died on that Friday for all they knew, that was the end. Because if death has the last word, then Easter is no miracle, and it holds absolutely *no* significance. But we haven't reached the end yet, so let this story do what it intends to do. And let this story be what it needs to be.

And if we return to today's gospel from Luke and the question of why that Jesus brings up, but more importantly his answer to the possible why question, then we will see that we have been given a glimpse into the very heart of God.

The Palm Sunday story – in fact, the entire Holy Week story is a story of life. It's the story of *our* lives. Joy. Love. Fear. Disappointment. Anger. Grief. Betrayal. Pain. Even into the ordinary – eating, drinking, washing – God breathes life. At the heart of the story, we encounter joy and grief, celebration and pain. Immersed in the journey through Holy Week is where we see our ordinary lives echoed in the life and love of Jesus. Here we see our imperfect lives reflected in the perfect and saving love of Christ. *This is our story.*

With all this in mind then, what are we supposed to do with this day? Well, for me at least, the answer is as simple and as complex as it was on the day it occurred. I think the hardest part of this story is accepting that we may never be able to fully understand the persistent and puzzling question of *why*. But maybe we can have more success answering another question – for whom.

The key to all of this then, I think, is that you and I hear that *this story is for us*. Jesus suffers so that when we are suffering, we know that God understands and cares for us. Jesus is completely alone by the end of the story so that when we feel alone, we know that God understands and is with us. Jesus cries out in despair so that when we become convinced that the whole world is against us and we're ready to give up, we know that God understands and holds on to us. Jesus dies so that we know God understands death and the fear of death and reminds us that death does not have the final word.

This is the story that we hear today – the story of God's relentless quest to redeem each and all of us in love. Each week we're invited into a story that's not about all that went wrong in the past week, but about what might go right in the week to come. It's a story that isn't about what we lack, but all that we've been given. And it's not a story that exposes our problems or shortcomings but instead lifts up our gifts and blessings. It is God's story that tells us again and again that we are loved, that we are precious, and that we have infinite value and worth in the eyes of God.

To tell you the truth – I don't exactly know what to do with all of this – but I trust that God does. I don't completely get it, but I don't really know that I have to either – because I believe that God does. And I'm not exactly sure that I want to figure it all out either – and that's okay – because God already has.

I think *this* is the very mystery of Jesus' journey to the cross. That although we may never fully understand the "why" of God's incomprehensible commitment to us – when we come face to face with Jesus on the cross, we can never doubt God's overwhelming love for us.

So, while lingering in Jesus' journey to the cross may be difficult for us, when we do, we are reminded that in Jesus, we have been given God's eternal and unbreakable promise that God is always and forever for us. *Why?* Because God loves us. And this my friends, makes enduring this moment completely worth it. So let our shouts of Hosanna ring. Welcome to Holy Week. Thanks be to God. Amen!