

Series: Lent (Feb. 17 - April 4): *Empty*

Sun., March 28: Palm Sunday [Pre-recorded and In-person]

Memory Verse: Romans 5:8 “But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

Message: **Empty Savior** -Pastor David

Text: “Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus.” -Philippians 2:5

Sermon Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11 (series text)

Reading of Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

Blurb: We explore the passion of our Savior as He makes His way to the cross. It is a grueling process made all the more unbearable as Jesus empties Himself so that He is able to carry out the will of the Father. We enter into this journey so we can know what such a sacrifice means for us and for the entire world.

[Recorded Worship Beginning]

WELCOME -Pastor Andrew

With waving of palm branches.

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor Andrew

“But God shows His love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” -
Romans 5:8

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Hosanna (Praise Is Rising)

The Lion and the Lamb

[Live Worship Beginning]

GATHERING SONG: *Lift High the Name of Jesus* -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

The story of Palm Sunday, with the waving of palm branches.

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“But God shows His love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” -
Romans 5:8

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Hosanna (Praise Is Rising)

All Praise to Thee, for Thou, O King Divine

Forever Reign

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Both Recorded & Live Worship]

PRAYERS/PALMS/SCRIPTURE READING: Mark 11:1-11 (CEB) -Reader: Pastor Andrew

Mark 11:1-11 tells the story when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. It turned into a parade, with lots of palm branches waving!

1 When Jesus and His followers approached Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives. Jesus gave two disciples a task, **2** saying to them, “Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ridden. Untie it and bring it here. **3** If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘Its master needs it, and He will send it back right away.’”

4 They went and found a colt tied to a gate outside on the street, and they untied it. **5** Some people standing around said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” **6** They told them just what Jesus said, and they left them alone. **7** They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes upon it, and He sat on it. **8** Many people spread out their clothes on the road while others spread branches cut from the fields. **9** Those in front of Him and those following were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! **10** Blessings on the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!” **11** Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. After He looked around at everything, because it was already late in the evening, He returned to Bethany with the Twelve.

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE: -Pastor Andrew

MESSAGE: Empty Savior

PP#1: Empty Savior (image: crown of thorns)

“Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus.” -Philippians 2:5

Empty Savior. Philippians 2:5 “Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus.”

PP#2: *Images of individual palm branches*

Okay, this is for kids and for everyone. Pick up your palm branches. I’m going to ask you if you’ve ever had *victory* doing certain things, and if you have, then take your palm branches and wave them nice and high, so we all know *you won the victory*. Okay? Here we go:

- Who here as ever been awarded an actual, physical trophy or ribbon for something?
- Who here has ever competed in a school team sports team and won a game or competition?
- Who here has competed in a school—but non-sports—competition (think science, or writing, or spelling, or robotics, or making something) and won?
- Who here has ever come in first place in a non-school competition (think scouts, 4H, etc.)?
- Who here has ever won a competition that had a *financial* prize?
- Who here has ever won a special drawing, where they draw for a prize?
- Who here has ever been presented with a recognition of merit or achievement or special title?
- Who here has ever been a part of receiving, in whatever setting, a standing ovation?

PP#3: *Image of an ancient Roman procession with the waving of palm branches, perhaps Trajan?*

Good job, everyone! We each have celebrated victory at some point! Now, I made you wave your palm branches to show your win because the palm branch is an ancient symbol of victory. Back in ancient Near East, the palm (by the way the word for *palm* was “phoenix” and shares the word root with phoenicia!), the palm was sacred and symbolized victory, triumph, and eternal life. A palm branch was awarded to victorious athletes in ancient Greece—along with the laurel wreath—like for the Olympic games, and a palm frond was one of the most common symbols of victory in the Roman Empire. When military heroes came home from their victories, it was common custom to meet them along the road and wave palm branches. This developed into long parades and processions, that would culminate in arriving through a triumphal arch.

PP#4: *Image of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, with the waving of palm branches.*

Can you see this backdrop for our Jesus story today? The word spread that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. Everyone was excited! The Miracle Worker is coming! He has amazing powers! He could be the Messiah and free them from their occupation by Rome. The Jewish prophets foretold of a mighty victory against their enemies. So, the people go cut palm branches and line the road, waving them as a sign of their support for the victory this incoming King will bring.

This is a weird dynamic, really. We who now read this story, we are a bit like Jesus, in that we know the future. We know that when Jesus goes to Jerusalem, He would greatly disappoint the people by not raising an insurrection against Rome, and that within *five days* he would be arrested and then killed.

So, we can see a bit how weird that day was for Jesus. He’s riding into Jerusalem with massive fanfare: people shouting and waving, “Victory! Victory!” And on one hand, Jesus knows that they are *wrong*. He will not bring victory against their Roman occupiers like they so desperately want. It’s all misguided and empty. But, on the other hand, Jesus knows that they are actually quite *correct*! They don’t understand it, but He IS coming to win a victory over their enemy: an enemy much bigger than Rome—the biggest victory in the history of creation. And so, Jesus accepts their confused cries of victory, because actually, they shouting what is eternally true. The palm branches they wave are more right than they could ever understand!

PP#5: *Image showing palm branches, showing Jesus’ passion/crucifixion, and a crown of thorns*

So, take a look at your palm branches again today. This has become a symbol of Jesus’ Kingdom, a sign of the salvation He came to bring. Jesus takes this ancient symbol of military victory and plunges it into defeat. In the Roman empire, there was no symbol more humiliating, more defeating, more empty, than crucifixion. And Jesus takes the palm branch—with the empty cries of Hosanna!—and carries it to the cross.

When the powerful around Him jeer and mock and ridicule Him, when they cast words of hate and hurt at Him, when they label Him defeated on the cross, Jesus cries out, “It is finished!”

Look at your palm branch! It is in His death that Jesus wins the victory. It is in defeat that Jesus conquers. It is in becoming the Sacrifice that Jesus earns the glory as King of Kings. Jesus’ crown of thorn is *truly and fully both a crown AND thorns*. Palm Sunday holds Jesus’ tension of both victory and defeat, life and death, strength in weakness, glory through humility.

PP#6: Empty Savior

1. Jesus wins victory through failure

The Roman concept of victory has no room for this: victory is when you come in first, when others are defeated. Strong wins, weak loses. But God shows a way that is so different from the world—opposite! God doesn't operate by the world's standards. He never has! God breaks in, plays by different rules, and brings salvation from the choking, exhausting definitions of reality. We see this today when we see Jesus riding into Jerusalem, with palm branches waving, while riding on the lowly donkey. It is Jesus' humility that makes Him the Savior.

This is what our guiding Scripture passage for this whole Lenten journey has been saying. We've been journeying with Philippians 2 in this whole Empty Series. Philippians 2:6-11 is an ancient hymn, likely one of the oldest parts of the New Testament, that Paul learned and then quoted in his letter to the Philippians. It's a hymn of Jesus' victory through failure, through humility. Listen this time to hear how Jesus embodies (pun intended!) "Empty."

PP#7-8: Philippians 2:6-11 (CEB) [Note, Reese: Please leave in poetic format.]

6 Though He was in the form of God,
 He did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.
 7 But He emptied Himself
 by taking the form of a slave
 and by becoming like human beings.
 When He found Himself in the form of a human,
 8 He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
 even death on a cross.
 9 Therefore, God highly honored Him
 and gave Him a name above all names,
 10 so that at the name of Jesus everyone
 in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow
 11 and every tongue confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Hear the first generations of Jesus-followers proclaim about our Jesus:

“6 Though He was in the form of God,
 He did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.
 7 But **He emptied Himself**
 by taking the form of a slave
 and by becoming like human beings.
 When He found Himself in the form of a human,
 8 He **humbled Himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death,
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 10 so that at the name of Jesus everyone
 in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow
 11 and every tongue confess
 that Jesus Christ **is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus wins by emptying Himself. It is through embracing weakness that He achieves honor. He did not use His status as God's Son as an escape or an advantage to be exploited. Instead He emptied Himself and chose obedience to the point of death. The palm branch dipped in defeat is raised in victory! Hosanna!

PP#9: *Image for people picking up their crosses and following Jesus.*

God operates differently. And God's people are called to operate that different way, too. We don't join the rat race. We don't compete by worldly standards. We don't step on people to get ahead, use others to win. We don't exploit weakness around us, we embrace our own weakness. We follow Jesus, and He calls us to His same humility.

The early Christians didn't just proclaim that amazing hymn about Jesus. They understood that this amazing Jesus calls His people to operate the same way! So, when Paul includes the hymn, look how He introduces the hymn as a calling for Jesus' followers to live the same way.

PP#10: Philippians 2:1-5 (CEB)

1 Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, 2 complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. 3 Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. 4 Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. 5 Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:

Though He was in the form of God

We go back to Philippians 2, but start five verses earlier. Verse 1, "Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, 2 complete my joy by **thinking the same way, having the same love**, being united, and agreeing with each other. 3 Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but **with humility** think of others as better than yourselves. 4 Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. 5 **Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:**"

PP#11: Empty Savior

1. Jesus wins victory through failure
2. God wins victory through our weakness

We've made sure that each of us have a palm branch this morning to take with us. I want you to take it home with you to remind you that God operates in your weakness. Where you get stuck, where you suffer defeat, where you are weak, God brings victory. Paul writes elsewhere, in 2 Corinthians 12:9, that God says, "My grace is sufficient for you, and in your weakness, my power is made perfect." Our weaknesses, our failings, our shortcomings, these are places where God brings His power. God brings victory not only *to* your failures, but *through* your failures. When we open our daily lives to Him, God uses our failures, our defeats, our mistakes to work His perfecting grace in us.

In staff meeting a couple of weeks ago Marilee, who is our church's Lay Leader, led devotions about how God uses our weaknesses. She shared that she found this true in her life. She said that a dozen years ago, when she was going through treatment for breast cancer, that she

experienced God's strength. And during that time 1. God showed up to her in the people that came alongside her, supported her, 2. She received blessings she never would have otherwise experienced, and 3. She grew in her faith and trust in God like never before. She said that although her cancer was—and is—is hard, she could honestly say that she would not wish for her cancer to be taken away. This was hard for her to say, she said, because no one wants cancer. But she knew that God didn't give her the cancer, but that God walked with her through it all, and continues to do that. She can now walk confidently with the unknown ahead because God had proven Himself faithful in her weakness. Her question to the rest of us I pass on to you on this Palm Sunday: How have you experienced God's strength in your weakness?

We learn humility as we follow a humble Jesus. Humility is letting God use our weakness to work blessing for us...and to work blessing through us! We are encouraged in our faith by Marilee's strengthened faith.

PP#12: *Image of two struggling people helping each other, like two people with casts on their legs leaning on each other and walking and smiling.*

I was speaking to Nickie Colby a few weeks ago, too. She shared how she for years has struggled with blindness, RSD pain, migraines, and encumbered mobility. Yet she shared with me how she was able to talk to some other people who had recently become blind and with others who were recently diagnosed with RSD. She said that she was able to speak from her experience, to identify with them like others couldn't, to commiserate with them, support them and encourage them. God was using her struggles to support and bless others who were struggling. God uses our weaknesses and defeats to bring victory to us, and through us to others.

I want your palm branch to remind you that God is bringing you victory in your weakness, in your struggles, and *through* them, for others. That's what our God does!

PP#13: Empty Savior

1. Jesus wins victory through failure
2. God wins victory through our weakness
3. Emptying our lives like Jesus entering Jerusalem

Now, we've gathered with the crowd this Palm Sunday to wave our branches as Jesus goes by. But I want us to keep showing up for Jesus all week long. Jesus comes into Jerusalem five times this week, and each time He does, He shows us how we need to empty ourselves so that God can use us more. We call this week Holy Week, and we are journeying with Jesus to Jerusalem, to the cross, and to Easter. This is going to be a journey of emptying ourselves as we follow our empty Savior. Put your palm branches behind Jesus some where, in some way, in your home. And each day this week, make a point to show up with Jesus, to empty yourself, so that He can have the victory in you and through you.

PP#14: Jesus enters Jerusalem EMPTY:

Sunday: Nothing for Him there

On Sunday, Jesus rides into Jerusalem. Lots of fanfare, yes. But Jesus goes to the temple. Now, as God's Son, that should be His, right! He is the God that they are supposed to worship. But, it says that Jesus goes to the temple, and "After He looked around at everything, because it was

already late in the evening, He returned to Bethany with the Twelve.” He looks around, and He saw nothing there for Him. It was empty of true worship, of people truly seeking God. It is too late. All He can do is leave.

Let’s reflect on this. In what ways is our worship empty? In what ways are our lives not fit for Jesus? What do we need to empty out, to let Jesus in? We’ve been talking a lot about this the last few weeks.

PP#15: Jesus enters Jerusalem EMPTY:

Sunday: Nothing for Him there

Monday: Jesus cleanses the temple

The next day, it says, Jesus goes back into Jerusalem. No fanfare this time. But He goes to the temple and He sees all the people buying and selling for profit stuff to be used in worship. Jesus is incensed! Such corruption and abuse, twisting God’s worship. It has turned into a transactional religion: do these things, and you are okay. Jesus turns the tables over!

In what ways do we need cleansing? How have we turned our faith into transactions: doing good deeds, doing certain practices, empty forms and hollow prayers? We need to empty out these superficial practices in order to have a more real relationship with Jesus.

PP#16: Jesus enters Jerusalem EMPTY:

Sunday: Nothing for Him there

Monday: Jesus cleanses the temple

Tuesday: Jesus teaches in the temple

On Tuesday, Jesus goes back into Jerusalem and to the temple. On Tuesday, Jesus teaches there, bringing the truth of God. Cleansing and emptying creates capacity to receive what is right, and true, and good. This week, may our palm branches remind us to sit at Jesus’ feet and learn His truth and wisdom for our lives. That means emptying out what we think makes sense and letting Jesus be our truth.

PP#17: Jesus enters Jerusalem EMPTY:

Sunday: Nothing for Him there

Monday: Jesus cleanses the temple

Tuesday: Jesus teaches in the temple

Thursday: Jesus washes the disciples’ feet

Now, on Wednesday Jesus stays in Bethany, one last day of hanging with His friends. But on Thursday, it’s Passover, and Jesus goes into Jerusalem, to an upper room, to celebrate the Passover Seder meal with His disciples. When they are eating, Jesus—their leader!—gets up, takes on the role of servant, and washes their feet. He tells them to serve one another and love one another. So, as you see your palm branch on Thursday, ask Jesus what it looks like for you to lay aside your position and serve those around you. How are you called to serve in weakness to love others?

PP#18: Jesus enters Jerusalem EMPTY:

Sunday: Nothing for Him there

Monday: Jesus cleanses the temple

Tuesday: Jesus teaches in the temple

Thursday: Jesus washes the disciples' feet

Well, they go out of the city to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prays the most radical prayer of humility the world has ever known. And there He is arrested, and early Friday morning, is drug back into Jerusalem bound as a criminal. He is falsely tried, condemned, and crucified. What shocking humility! Such weakness, such failure. Can there be any victory here?

PP#19: Jesus enters Jerusalem EMPTY:

Sunday: Nothing for Him there

Monday: Jesus cleanses the temple

Tuesday: Jesus teaches in the temple

Thursday: Jesus washes the disciples' feet

Friday: Jesus crucified

This is where we will come back to the story on Friday, when we join in worship for our Good Friday service at 7 p.m.

Between now and Friday, hold your palm branch of victory. Let it dip into failure. And raise it to Jesus, our empty Savior, who through defeat wins the victory. In your life, lift your failures to God so He can use them to bring blessing to you, and through you. And each day this week, let your palm branch remind you that in God, it is not *either* victory or defeat, palm or passion, life or death, but it is choosing life *and* death, palm *and* passion, defeat *and* victory.

We journey with Jesus! Hosanna!

Amen.

CLOSING SONG: *The Lion and the Lamb*

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-Easter Offering, next Sunday, UMCOR.

-Give of your monies to God's work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in or, most conveniently, you can make an automated transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the "square" on the bulletin.

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Today, 2-4 p.m.: Easter Hop - Easter candy in the parking lot!

Fri., 7 p.m.: Good Friday worship

Fri., 8 p.m. - Saturday, Midnight: Prayer Vigil, in-person and remote. Sign up!

Sun., 6:30 a.m. Sunrise service at the beach

Sun., 10:00 a.m. Easter worship, in-person and recorded.

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"But God shows His love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us." - Romans 5:8

BENEDICTION -Pastor David