

## **“Our Superhero Jesus”**

John 12:12-19

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In our church calendar, we call today Palm Sunday (or we call it Passion Sunday, too). These two titles seem to be paradoxical to each other because Palm Sunday celebrates Jesus’ triumphant entry to Jerusalem, but Passion Sunday focuses on Jesus’ passion and suffering. How can we better understand the true meaning of Palm Sunday story (or Passion Sunday) and make this story relevant to us? If we find a word to penetrate the whole point for Jesus’ bold act and courageous decision to enter the city of Jerusalem and take a risk for his life, what will be the key word to depict the whole point? It is *power*! This morning, let us explore the power that Jesus offers to us.

Let’s take a closer look and see what happened in Jerusalem. Today’s Scripture reading gives us a brief sketch on the first day of Jesus’ Holy week in Jerusalem. When Jesus appeared in the city, the crowd’s welcome was quite surprising and unexpected. Jesus knew that this great welcome was not really for him. The crowd was projecting its strong desire and seeking power to liberate them from their bondage. They identified Jesus as a mighty king and warrior who would bring them success. They believed that the New Messiah would bring them political, economical and social success to fulfill their wishes and he would change their lives. But Jesus knew that this power wouldn’t change them, rather Jesus humbly came and entered Jerusalem to bring salvation not political and economic power and success but success which fulfilled his mission by giving away his life. How can this be possible?

Let’s go a little deeper. Please imagine you are Jesus and saw the big crowd excitedly and jubilantly welcoming you when you humbly entered Jerusalem thinking of your death ahead of time. In our Scripture reading, it says, “The crowd took branches of Palm trees and went to meet their Superhero shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord- the King of Israel!” Just imagine if you put yourself in Jesus’ shoes and encountered this great welcome. Do you think that Jesus took it for granted to receive this great welcome or did he feel be bewildered and worried about the crowd? The essential difference between Jesus and the crowd lies in different understanding of how power can change and transform people and people’s lives. Simply speaking, what is the ultimate concern of power to change? Can political and economic power, and social influence change us? Or does the divine power that led Jesus, the son of God to suffer and die on the cross change us? This is the

ultimate concern that Jesus struggled with. Let's humbly reflect a theological and philosophical question first. Who are we? When I attended a Lenten book discussion small group, one of the participants briefly defined us, human beings as a stubborn creation against God. Do you agree?

Let me share my personal reflection. Last Friday and Saturday, I had a challenging experience like Jesus' holy week. A month ago my wife, Youngjae told me that she would like to attend one overnight retreat for pastor's spouses and I knew that I was supposed to take care of my two boys by myself. As scheduled, Youngjae took her "time-off", Friday and Saturday leaving two wild and active boys for me! By all means, she deserved it, but it was a very challenging and overwhelming time for me. Well, I want to call it 'Passion Weekend' to be honest with you! For example, while I was bathing the boys, I clearly said to them, "Don't splash water over the bathroom floor, but they wouldn't listen! I always taught them to share their toys with each other, but it is hard for them to get along well all the time. Either Jacob cries or Joshua cries when one finds his favorite toy and each claims ownership. In my eyes, those are not important things because they are only a laser pointer or a mini car. As a father, I really love them and enjoyed my time with them, but on the other hand, I was able to think of God's heart when God sees human beings from a parent's perspective. Aren't we merely little ones who are jealous of one another and rebellious to God having our own way?



I want to share my observation on my children. My second one, Joshua just turned two last month. Now his favorite character is Dinosaurs after we watched the movie, *The Good Dinosaur* a couple of months ago. Interestingly, his favorite one is not the Good dinosaur but Tyrannosaurus Rex, violent one. He carries his dinosaur at all times. He often pretends to march like a dinosaur. Jacob also loves superheroes. Spiderman and Iron man are his favorite heroes. He always imitates his heroes' act, shouting and using many body moves everywhere.

My wife struggles to understand why they like these characters. I believe that there is a connection between little one's favorite characters and their psychological desire for power, especially among boys. For example, some psychologists argue that children's favorite characters are transitional objects as replacement of their parents. Parents provide power, love and care. Teddy bears, dinosaurs or Iron man might be tokens of their attachment to their loving ones or role models to be like them. In other words, my son, Joshua wants to be a powerful daddy or God's creation by identifying himself as a strong and

powerful dinosaur. And Jacob wants to be a superhero by his attachment to his characters. One day, out of curiosity, I asked Jacob why do you love Spiderman and Ironman? He simply answered that he wants to save people. But Youngjae often reminds me that Jacob doesn't cooperate to clean up his toys and his room though!

Let's go back to our Scripture story and identify the crowd as us or like our children. Israelites were awaiting a new Messiah from their miserable situation. The Israelites were seeking a mighty and powerful Messiah who would free Israel politically from the Roman Empire, liberate them from poverty and bring them economic success. We easily feel how excited and jubilant the crowd was when they saw Jesus as their new Messiah and King. In order to be their Messiah, Jesus must be a superhero with mighty power like Dinosaur or Iron man. The crowd identified Jesus as King David. They eagerly longed for a Messiah like King David who brought them political power, economic success and social influence through his powerful leadership in their history. Simply speaking, the crowd projected their hope onto Jesus. As long as he showed this visible power, he could be their Messiah. Honestly, this is a part of human nature.

In a sense, Jerusalem is a metaphor for our contemporary lives and the crowd who longs for power is the projection of our human desire and wishes. Jesus knew the needs of the crowd and observed their desperate eagerness for political power, economic and social success. But he knew that nothing change would them. Materialism can't transform us, but only divine touch and power can change us and transform us. The divine and spiritual power that Jesus wanted to bring to the Israelites and us is not material power and influence, but God himself and His son's life to offer power and strength. Simply speaking, our Superhero Jesus offers God's grace, a gift of forgiveness and blessing of peace. He brings us God's unconditional love and mercy.

Today, Jesus wants to enter our hearts to be our Messiah and Savior, not as a King warrior but offering us the Spirit of God's unconditional acceptance and love. This love has a great power that can change our lives. Let us welcome our Messiah, Jesus and follow this superhero as our way. Amen.