



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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PALM SUNDAY

SIGHT, SOUND AND SILENCE: STILL LENT

All Glory, Laud, and Honor:  
Seeing, Hearing, and Touching Jesus  
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 18:1-17

It was one of those days that you knew was different from the moment your eyes popped open. Was the sun shining a little brighter? Were the birds singing louder? Did the breeze feel fresher? There was something palpable in the air as the residents of Bethany began their day. It was something you could feel but not touch. It was something you heard absent any specific sound. It was something you could see without focusing on any one thing in particular.

While the sun was still low over the hills, a crowd gathered near the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. The Teacher was inside. Everyone had heard stories about the miracles he had performed. Most of the people in Bethany had been present when Jesus called Lazarus from the grave. It was always exciting when Jesus came to visit his dear friends. It always meant that the rest of the villagers would get to see and hear him as well.

On this particular morning, a rumor was going around that Jesus planned to go into the city. There was nothing unusual about that. Everyone in Bethany made the short trip to Jerusalem to sell goods, get supplies, and visit family and friends who lived there. Of course they all went to Temple as well. Since the Feast of Passover was only a few days away, Hebrews from all over the region were coming to the holy city. So it was not surprising that Jesus might go as well. Yet, today seemed different.

Around mid-morning, two of the men who traveled with Jesus came to the house leading a donkey. That seemed odd because rumor was they had gone all the way to Jerusalem to get it and bring it back to Bethany when there were plenty of fine donkeys in the village.

Before long, Jesus and his friends came outside. People began to call his name and ask for blessings or healing or some other kindness. A voice a bit louder than the rest asked, "Where are you going, Jesus?" Jesus looked at him and smiled. It was not a big, happy smile as if he were trying to contain a surprise. Instead it was a warm, caring smile that carried gratitude. "We're

going to Jerusalem for the afternoon,” he said. “There are some things I need to do.”

By this time practically everyone in the village was gathered near the house. The hum of conversation rose steadily. If you happened to be standing a way off, you wouldn't be able to make out a word, but you could easily detect the growing excitement and anticipation of something. But what?

Jesus climbed upon the donkey and started slowly toward Jerusalem, his twelve disciples walking with him—along with everyone else. At the edge of the village, the group began the slow descent to the valley that lay below the magnificent city a little less than two miles to the west.

Something about seeing Jesus sitting on the donkey stirred the crowd. This humble creature was surely not a gallant steed, but Jesus did look regal as he rode along. Someone commented about how all of this reminded him of that passage from the scroll of Zechariah which said, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). For months there had been whispered suggestions that Jesus might be the long-awaited Messiah. The notion that he might be fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy ignited more excitement in the crowd. A woman remembered that Jesus might be a descendant of King David and that bit of information ricocheted through the crowd. People began walking up to Jesus and calling him “Blessed.” Someone shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” and another person answered with, “Blessed is he who come in the name of the Lord!” Someone in the back shouted, “Hosanna in the highest!” Soon the people were chanting and singing. Someone stripped a branch off a palm tree and began waving it like a banner. Other people followed suit. On both sides of the road, you could hear the crack of breaking branches then the whoosh of leaves sweeping the air. The graveled road crunched under a hundred feet. Birds sang overhead. Dogs from the village barked and race back and forth. Somebody took off his cloak and spread it ahead of the donkey. Another did the same until the people created a carpet on which the donkey carrying Jesus walked. Eventually, it all fused into a march of triumph and a song of celebration.

From the walls of the city, it must have looked like the procession of some dignitary approaching Jerusalem. A small army of people marched with a man on a donkey in the center. Colorful cloths paved the way and a joyous song floated over the valley.

Anyone close by who wasn't completely caught up in the chanting and singing and waving might have noticed that Jesus seemed to be the only one not enjoying this excursion. He was smiling and you could tell he was honored, but he was not cheering along. He was not acting like someone about to make a grand entrance into the city of Jerusalem.

There was a wistfulness in his countenance and a bit of sadness in his eyes. Looking toward Jerusalem, he appeared to look beyond the city to something no one else could see. When his gaze did fall on the crowd of people singing and chanting and waving around him, his face tightened with emotion as if he was trying to tamp down some feeling that was fighting to come out.

As the road tilted upward toward the gate of the city, the singing grew louder. A couple of Pharisees who had accompanied the crowd from Bethany were concerned. They were all too familiar with Jesus and considered him a troublemaker. Passover was at hand and the last thing they wanted or needed was this heretic interfering with their celebration of God's gracious deliverance from bondage.

The Pharisees approached Jesus and insisted he put an end to this nonsense and quiet his followers. "Teacher," they shouted, "order your disciples to stop." Looking regal, even on an humble donkey, Jesus gazed into their dark eyes and deeper into their souls. A big smile spread across his face as he yelled back, "To tell you the truth, if these folks suddenly went silent, the stones of the city would shout out!" Hearing this exchange, the crowd cheered and took up the song with greater vigor. They marched through the gate and paraded into the city.

What happened next was strange indeed. The bustling city with throngs of pilgrims in addition to its citizens simply swallowed the little parade. Their chants could not compete with the noise of the city. The coming and going of so many people soon divide the once united band and scattered them into side streets and shops where they remembered errands, saw other friends, and quickly slipped back into their routine lives.

Alone with his disciples, Jesus instructed the two who had gotten the donkey to return it. He and the others made their way to the temple. Pilgrims from all over crowded the courtyards. In one section, lines of tired travelers waited to exchange their coins so they could purchase a couple of doves to make sacrifice. In contrast to the anxious and humble faces of the people who counted out their precious coins, Jesus noticed the grins of the

moneychangers and livestock salesmen as their pockets grew heavy with those coins. Without warning, Jesus lurched toward the tables where they plied their trade. Growling, he reminded them that his father's house was a house of prayer and not a den of thieves! The tables crashed as he tossed them over. The livestock erupted in sound as he freed them and shooed them out into the crowd. There was instant chaos and clamor as he cleared the courtyard of the merchants who fed off the faith of his people.

Breathing hard, eyes burning, hands clenched, Jesus brushed by the people who ran to see what was happening. He was well down the street when his disciples caught up with him, silent with astonishment. He said it was time to go and they slipped out a nearby gate and made their way back to the road they had traveled just an hour or so before.

As darkness dampened all sound and sight, bringing calm to the world, all was still and quiet as Jesus and his dearest friends walked silently back to Bethany. There was no crowd, no parade, no song or chant. Even the gravel beneath their feet was silent as they walked along.

In a few days, what had just happened would be clear to many and a puzzle to others. Jesus would reveal through his words and especially through his actions that God could no longer be boxed into a temple or a tomb. God's people had seen and heard and touched Jesus. They sensed they were in the presence of God and understood that God was doing something new.

For going on two thousand years we have been telling this story year after year. What do you notice this year? What do you see the people doing? What do you notice in Jesus' eyes? What do you see on the road? In the city? In the temple? What do you hear in that throng of people walking to Jerusalem? What would you be saying? What do you wish you could say today? What would you touch? Would you grab a branch and wave it? Would you pat the donkey on the neck? Would you dare reach out and touch the sleeve of Jesus' robe?

Jesus came to remind us that in every way God speaks and listens, looks at us and touches our lives. We also need to look and listen, to speak and touch. The more we engage all of our senses with our faith, we will discover God in our midst. Amen.

April 14, 2019

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Today we join the refrain that has been sung through the ages, O God, and give thanks to you because your steadfast love endures forever. No matter what comes our way—good or ill—one truth to which we can always hold is that your steadfast love endures forever. We are grateful for the ways in which your love has steadied us in the past as well as at the many ways you have already demonstrated you love to us today. Thank you, O God, for holding us in your heart.

As we step into this holy week which will bring us to Easter, we pray that we will be mindful each day of the love which keeps us. Enable us to greet each day with eyes and ears wide open to the wonders of your world. Help us also to open our hearts to the many ways you are involved in our world.

Make us mindful of those among us who are ill and need our support. Reveal to us the power of your healing grace and move among us to restore life and health. Enable us to empathize with all who grieve, allowing the tender places in our lives to offer comfort and assurance to one another. Open the doors of our compassion to offer support to anyone who feels lost and uncertain where to turn in life. Remind us that you have provided us with the resources needed in every challenging circumstance of life and guide us to help rebuild lives that have been broken for whatever reason. Call us to be your partners for good, O God, and demonstrate your steadfast love through us.

Remind us this week that no matter how desperate and futile circumstances might seem in this world, you alone possess the power of resurrecting life, O God. In this holy week, reveal your power once again and remind the world that your steadfast love will never let us go. Grant us new life, we pray, through Jesus our Christ. Amen.