

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA
Palm Sunday, Year B, March 25, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen, "The Ordinary Becomes Holy"
Mark 11:1-11

today is actually two days of the church year rolled into one; it is Palm Sunday to start off with, which tells of Jesus' triumphal arrival into Jerusalem; but then it is also Passion Sunday, which tells the rest of what happened to Jesus up until Easter morning; it covers this second part because of the practical recognition that many people who attend today will not necessarily attend Maundy Thursday or Good Friday services, and would therefore otherwise miss out on those important parts of the story; I do hope that you will attend both the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services, because they will address the story of Jesus' last days in much more detail, and will help you appreciate and experience the joy of Easter even more

the first Palm Sunday started out like any ordinary day; remember, Saturday was the sabbath in Israel, so Sunday was just a regular day; people would have been going off to work in shops or fields, or working around their homes; most people had heard about Jesus, but nobody knew he was coming into Jerusalem that morning; when people did find out he was coming, they began spreading the word; soon the whole town knew; they began rushing to the Bethany Road from all over Jerusalem because they wanted to see Jesus in person

but there was a problem: how could they welcome this extraordinary person when they hadn't had any time to get ready?; so they used what they had with them, just ordinary stuff; the road was dirty and dusty, so they took off their cloaks and laid them across the roadway; and where they didn't have enough cloaks to cover the road, they covered it with palm fronds and tree branches; they also used the palm fronds and branches to wave in the air, like royal banners; and since they didn't have any musical instruments, they sang a royal hymn they all knew from worshipping in the Temple; it was like a reception for a king, because the people were catching on that that was who Jesus really was; a new kind of king; a king for the ordinary people

this story has some powerful things to teach us; it teaches us that on any ordinary day we can praise the Lord; it doesn't only have to be on Sundays that we praise the Lord, any day will do; it teaches us that we can be in any ordinary place to

praise the Lord; it doesn't only have to be in church; it could be at home, at work, out at our leisure activities, or on the street; it teaches us that we can be any ordinary person to praise the Lord; we don't have to be a priest, or a lay minister, or a choir member, or a Sunday School teacher; praising the Lord is a job for everyone; and it teaches us that we can use any ordinary thing to praise the Lord; we don't have to have church clothes, or a prayer book, or the Bible, or a hymnal; praising the Lord with our hearts, minds, hands, and voices will do

the other thing this story teaches us is that Jesus' presence transforms whatever is ordinary and makes it into something extraordinary; that morning, that road, those cloaks and palms and branches, those people all underwent a transformation; and so do we, whenever we consciously put ourselves into the frame of heart and mind of being present with Christ; and how do we do that?: by thinking of Jesus, by praying to Jesus, by listening for his responses to our prayers, by speaking Jesus' name, by acting like Jesus, or by looking for Jesus in other people; any one of these is all it takes to invoke his presence with us

and when we do, Jesus' presence anywhere, makes it a holy place; Jesus' presence any day, makes it a holy day; Jesus' presence with any one of us, makes us a holy person; Jesus' presence with anyone else, makes them a holy person; Palm Sunday may seem like a special day; but any and every day can become a special day if we invite Jesus into it

take advantage of all of the services offered during this Holy Week to help transform your life from the ordinary to the extraordinary; take advantage, every day, of inviting Jesus into your life, to make every day an extraordinary and holy day

and as a reminder of this message of being aware, each day, of how the ordinary becomes holy, look how this ordinary palm frond can be folded into a holy palm cross; after the service bring your palm to the Great Hall and during fellowship time I will demonstrate how to fold yours into a cross [watch a video here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfZaD1iSeP8>]; keep this palm cross with you throughout the rest of Holy Week; and even throughout the rest of the year, put it somewhere where you will see it often as a reminder to practice your faith and to invite Jesus' presence into your life; and then bring it to church with you next year, to the Shrove Tuesday Pancake and Chili Supper, when the palms will be burned to make the ashes used on Ash Wednesday