

Sunday Sermon March 29, 2026

Palm Sunday Sermon Rev Coleen Tully

Palm Sunday was one of my favorite Sundays. Jesus was King and we celebrated his triumphant entry into Jerusalem by dancing around, feeling the joy of that entry, swinging those palms around until we were exhausted.

I guess so many people were skipping Holy Week services—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Saturday Vigil—that it was changed to the liturgy we have today. Palm/Passion Sunday is now one of the most cluttered and confusing liturgical days of the church year.

We have a gut-wrenching shift from triumph and joy to betrayal and grief in less than sixty minutes. But the goal is accomplished. There is no skipping the betrayal and abandonment, the cruel, unjust trials, the false accusations, the floggings, the crown of thorns, the bloody wounds, or Jesus's mysterious silence. There are reasons we need to know what happens to Christ between the triumphant, jubilant cries on Palm Sunday and the bloodthirsty screams calling for his crucifixion a few days later. Because the story is not just about them. It is also about us.

Reality is, these are still stories of the world in which we live. We struggle hard not to act out of hate; but we continue to perform acts of betrayal against our own brothers and sisters; we try hard to live in love, but it is easier said than done.

These people in today's story, they tried to do right, like we try to do right. And that's where we recognize ourselves. It was a mixed-up mess of good and bad. Judas kissed Christ in order to betray him, and then felt so bad he committed suicide. Peter swore an oath to be faithful before denying even knowing him. Pilate condemned him, but said, "Why, what harm has he done?" The soldiers crucified him, then acknowledged, "He is the son of God." It was in them and it is in us that he is glorified; it was in them and it is in us that he was crucified. Love and hate. I'm not sure we take that struggle in ourselves seriously enough. I'm not sure we take that struggle in the world seriously enough.

And it is in this light that we have to know the whole story. Because, knowing all of that—knowing who they were and what they would do—Jesus still came. He came embracing what he knew them to be. He came then and now, reaching out for those who were about to do, and who did do, all kinds of harm. He reached out to those who hailed him as Messiah until the requirement was too great and who then denounced him, or else ignored him as though they had never met.

Jesus still came for them. And Jesus still comes for us.

Through Christ, God chooses to meet us in our vulnerability, to come to us in our weakness, to love us when we are at our most un-lovable, and to redeem us amidst our sin.

He is the embodiment of God's profound love for the world—all the world. The righteous and unrighteous, the repentant and unrepentant, the religious and irreligious, those who greet him as Messiah and those who reject him as criminal. We are all of those things, changing perhaps through the course of the day or of the hour or the week or in our lifetime. Nonetheless, at one time or another, that is a description of all of us.

And there is only one reason God sent his Son into the world to experience all that we are and can be. That reason is that God loves us.

The fight between good and evil is a fight in which he participated. He, being the Son of God, fought that fight. And, spoiler alert: good wins.

The cross is many things. It is a symbol of shame and scandal, an instrument of torture, a sign of human brutality and of sin. But it is something more. It is also, for all the guilt and for all the shame and for all the horror attached to it, a symbol of love.

Jesus died not in order to make it possible for God to love us, but to demonstrate that God already loves us.

The curtain of the temple that once symbolized the separation of God from humanity was torn in two—top to bottom. With that tearing of the veil, we were given a new covenant with God.

And that new covenant assures us that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God.

Not then. Not now. Not ever. Amen.