

Sermon Illustrations

Thoughts for Palm/Passion Sunday Offering or Sermon

Matthew 21:1-9

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 "Say to Daughter Zion,
'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. **8** A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,
"Hosanna to the Son of David!"
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Crowds gathered. People took their clothing, laid it on the ground, sacrificed their basic needs to prepare the way for Jesus. They spilled over onto the road, hands uplifted, palms waving, eager to greet their King. Joy seeps out of them, delight and excitement and expectation brings tangible hope to the air. In the same way, our Mozambican brothers and sisters weekly offering evokes unreserved praise to our Father.

Jerusalem's unreserved worship we read about and Mozambique's vibrant offerings starkly contrasts with the North American church's usual tendencies. Many U.S. worshippers discretely place their offering into a special envelope before they leave their homes. We carefully seal the envelopes up, contained and tidy with our pre-printed codes ensuring absolute anonymity. In the service, the worshipper clandestinely drops the envelope into a plate with a slight of hand reminiscent of a magician palming a card. Ushers resembling Secret Service agents with liturgically colored pocket squares collect the plates, never uttering a word, never making eye contact.

In contrast, worshippers in a thatched-roof church made of reeds in Mozambique dance their offering forward, waving their corn and bananas overhead like Palm Sunday branches. Their exuberance is not prideful or boastful. Instead it is their unbridled gratitude and joy that they have something to share, which sets their feet to dancing. It is their deep appreciation for the love our Father lavishes upon them that makes them hungry for celebration.

Pause, and wonder how Jesus' entry into Jerusalem would have been different if those gathered on the side of the road kept their hands in their pockets and avoided eye contact with Jesus. Imagine a silent road, devoid of shouts of praise, devoid of hope for the Father. Pause, and wonder, how can our offering today have the flavor and fervor of Mozambique and Jerusalem? Let's worship our Savior.

Originally written by Drew and Rhonda VanDyke Colby. Edited by Amanda Pelletier.