

**2018-03-25 Palm Sunday**

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artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

I always think about on Palm Sunday how clueless the crowd was, do you remember? I mentioned that a few minutes ago. The crowd was shouting these words of praise “Hosanna less if he comes in the name of the Lord” thinking that Jesus was going to be their king, which of course Jesus was going to be. But it's easy to see what happens with the crowd. See mob mentality is not a good way to worship because the mobs intentions turned very quickly in this Gospel narrative and when we get to Good Friday what you find is the crowd shouting out “crucify Him”. I don't know if it's exactly the same crowd but I would bet my house that some of the people were in both crowds— some of the people who are shouting Hosanna just a few days later and up shouting crucify him. And the crowd is kind of clueless. Even those who maybe had the purest and best of intentions still want to do the wrong kind of king, this is what I was hinting at with the kids. And I think a donkey is a clue: We want a warrior king on a war horse we want a King who's going to crush our enemies. The Jewish people were oppressed under Roman rule at that time they definitely wanted a Messiah King who would come and overthrow the Roman Empire and place them and restore them to the power and dignity that they thought they were owed as God's chosen people. Here's something that Saint Augustan said about how Jesus really is a king “Because the master of humility, the master of humility is Christ who humbled himself and became obedient even to death even the death of the cross”, which by the way was the instrument of crushing insurrection in the Roman Empire. “Thus He does not lose His divinity when He teaches us humility. What great thing was it to the king of the ages to become the king of humanity for Christ was not the king of Israel so that He might exact attacks or equip an army with weaponry and visibly vanquish an enemy, He was the king of Israel in that He rules minds, in that He gives counsel for eternity, in that He leads into the Kingdom of Heaven for those who believe, hope and love, it is a condescension not an advancement for one who is the Son of God, equal to the Father, the Word through whom all things were made to become. The King of Israel it is an indication of pity, not an increase in

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power and if we want to follow Jesus, we are following the king of humility.” That's not really what you're hoping for when your guy becomes the leader.

And we all know this now, we all have the benefit of a few thousand- couple thousand years of of people talking about this and thinking about it and if you've been around Artisan for a while, you know that I hit this theme pretty much every year on Palm Sunday. And it's kind of somewhat fashionable to criticize that crowd— what a bunch of rubes they are, how clueless they must have been and it's very on brand for us that Artisans too. This is a place where it's safe to engage in some- that kind of deconstruction. To critically examine and even interrogate the assumptions that we all bring with us when we try to live out our faith in the twenty-first century. I was just re-listening to a really wonderful podcast interview with Father Richard Rohr and encourage you to go find this if you haven't already listen to “The Bible for normal people” podcast with Richard Rohr, it's fabulous. One of the things that he talks about in there and has talked about a lot in his ministry is the idea that there are three boxes— think of three boxes for spiritual growth and here I'll just kind of quote what he what he's written about this: “Let's think in terms of what I call the three boxes. The three boxes are order, disorder and reorder. The first, order, where we all begin as a necessary first containment but this structure this first box, if you will, is dangerous if we stay there too long it is too small and self-serving and must be deconstructed by the trials and vagaries of life, the cross or disorder, you have to have that second box to deconstruct that first box. In other words continuing on initial order doesn't really know the full picture but it thinks it does. Only in the final reorder stage can darkness and light co-exist, can paradox be OK. We are finally at home in the only world that ever existed this is true and contemplative knowing here death is a part of life, failure is a part of victory and imperfection is included in perfection— opposites collide and unite everything belongs”. That's Father Richard Rohr who is one of the most brilliant thinkers alive today and I hope he's with us for many more years.

You know he talks about not getting stuck in that first box and for many of us who were raised in a more conservative, fundamentalist, overly simplistic environment that first box is easy to identify. Those thing that he says in other places by the way is that those of us who have that background in some ways are better off than those who don't if we can get through the process, which is very interesting because I think a lot of times we want to reject that first box. We want to think of that first box as we think of the people in the crowd on Palm Sunday— What a bunch of clueless rubes who didn't get it. And that feels really good, you know what that is? That sitting in the second box and getting stuck there instead of being stuck in the first box. See we get stuck in that deconstruction phase because it feels so good. We feel so much

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more self-aware, we feel so much more well informed and it's very easy for us to say we are so much better than those people we left behind.

And on Palm Sunday I am often finding myself wondering if all this sophistication in our faith prevents us from fully and unashamedly participating in the worship of God because I think in that first box it's very easy because you don't have to think about all the difficult things and then the third box it becomes possible again but in that second box we can't- we can't get our heads around the jumping and dancing and singing and shouting for Jesus that happens on Palm Sunday. Because that crowd there definitely in the first box during this triumphal entry they're about to get thrown into the second box real hard and it's going to be really painful but they're in that first box and it's so important to remember that getting out of that first box is important but being stuck in the second box is not much better, if at all, than being stuck in that first one. And Richard Rohr tells us again and again there is no direct flight from the first box to the third box the only way through— is through that deconstruction, through that death, through that crucifixion, which by the way the lectionary on this Sunday of the year gives us two options we always choose the “Liturgy of the Palms”, Palm Sunday but the other option is the “Liturgy of the Passion”, which tells the whole bloody story. If we were to do it or you do that of the passion it's like two and a half chapters of gospel reading. I mean you look at on the website you have to scroll and scroll and scroll and see what you think let's just do the “Liturgy of the Palms” again. And traditionally the church particularly the, you know, the Western church, the Protestant church, the Evangelical church which is the stream that we are swimming in, is not great at the Passion part and we like Easter and we like Palm Sunday and we forget all the and messy painful stuff that happens in between. So this is my plug for you to come to our Good Friday Tenebrae service Friday night at 11:00 pm. If you've never been to this it's one of the most powerful things we do all year long, please come to it if you possibly can. We'll be right in this room it's darkness, candles, reading, contemplation and then we leave in silence and it's really powerful. It's a chance for us to kind of step into that that Passion narrative in a way that we just don't do on this Sunday of the year because Palm Sunday is, you know, I'd probably get fired if we didn't do Palm Sunday, first of all, and, secondly, it is a lot easier to structure a liturgy around.

So anyway, ultimately the reason that we embrace deconstruction at Artisan is not because we want to dwell in it but because it's the only way to get through to that third box— there's no direct flight. So it's absolutely right and good that here at Artisan we embrace lament, we pray the Psalms of lament as if they were ours and so often they are but if we never pray the celebratory Psalms as if they also were our words I think we miss out on the true joy of our salvation. It's absolutely right and good that we had Artisans think critically about the Bible as a rich library of religious texts that span across maybe fifteen hundred years, written in all kinds

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of different places, by all kinds of different people, with all kinds of evolving sensibilities about who God is. We think about all of those things when we read the Scriptures but if getting so kind of sophisticated and advanced in that process prevents us from allowing the Word of God to shape our hearts and minds then we are missing out on a unique part of spiritual formation that I believe only the scriptures can provide for us. It's absolutely right and good at Artisan that we acknowledge the fickle nature of religious belief especially as it's expressed in large crowds like the one on Palm Sunday or like the one that dominates most of American culture and politics. But if we get so concerned with getting it right, because others are getting it wrong that we don't dare to jump up and shout our allegiance to Jesus then I think we run the risk of never allowing God to captivate our hearts and souls and minds in a way that actually results in inner transformation and actually results in the world being transformed by our witness.

So it's hard for us, maybe especially hard for us at Artisan, let's be honest about who we are, to do the jump and shout, to do the joy and dance. The kids over here were so awesome this morning they were doing a little circle dance during the songs and then when the last drum hit hit they all kind of fell down I felt like I was at a Fish concert. [Laughter] I have been to seventeen of those and the dancing is not very good at those concerts but I tell you what's nice about it you will know if you go to a Fish concert you will never be the worst dancer. If you don't know who Fish is, God bless you, you don't need to know, but it's really bad like smelly, white-hippy dancing and every time I'm there I'm I think to myself this maybe they're having a spiritual experience that may not be the one that would fit into my Christian box but they are letting loose in a way that I never do and the kids were letting loose in a way that I never do and that we never do I mean some of your hand raisers and you feel like you have to fill out a permission slip to do that in this in this room. Some of you like to shout Amen and you are going to die if you don't get to do it soon but you have to wait until Baber comes before you can do it [Laughter]. So if you would like to dance before the Lord like David, I mean, not exactly like David, but you know like like you do in some other churches and you just feel like when you're in this room it's not with the way we do things and it's OK we're making space for other stuff but man it would be good if we could let loose just a little bit.

So we got a couple more songs of praise today, I sense that we're done with this moment. We're going to take Communion today, the band would you would you come up and kind of get us started? Because otherwise I'll never finish. I extend the invitation to the table of Jesus we'll take communion together, there's two more songs. And kids if you're finished with your palms I think that we're going to start the parade out in the lobby so you can go out there and then during that last song they're going to, they're going to lead us and some of that like exuberant stuff so if you need to raise the roof or do the hippie dance or say amen or shout Hosanna or whatever feels like the thing that gets you out of your space encourage you to do that, it is

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Palm Sunday after all, you could even clap on one and three [Laughter]. Listen I don't recommend it but if that's the only ones you can find good gravy don't let being wrong about something stop you from praising God please all right. I want to invite you now to come and receive the sacraments of grace on offer here at the Lord's table. We celebrate the Lord's Supper every week at Artisan. You can come and receive the bread and dip it in one of the cups remembering Christ's body which is broken for you, remembering his blood which is shed for the forgiveness of sins. Joining in unity with each other, your siblings in Christ and proclaiming His death and His resurrection until He returns. There will be a member of the prayer team at the back of the room to be happy to pray with you if you'd like at this time and our table is open to all who are following Jesus today in this place, membership not required. So let's continue to worship God with exuberance in the sacrament and in song. I'm so glad that we are here in this together. Amen.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at [ArtisanChurch.com](http://ArtisanChurch.com)