

+++ In the Name of Jesus +++

Title: “Cross Purposes”

Date: Palm Sunday, March 29, 2026

Text: John 12:12-19

<sup>12</sup>The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting,  
‘Hosanna!’

‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’

‘Blessed is the king of Israel!’

<sup>14</sup>Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written:

<sup>15</sup>‘Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; Behold, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.’

<sup>16</sup>At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

<sup>17</sup>Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. <sup>18</sup>Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. <sup>19</sup>So the Pharisees said to one another, ‘See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!’

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People who find themselves working “at cross purposes with each other” don’t usually accomplish very much. The problem is that they are not cooperating, but competing with each other. So in a business setting (for example) the boss might have a certain goal in mind, but if the workers don’t understand or share that goal, they’re all going to have problems! Because everybody is pulling in a different direction, *none* of their goals are going to be met. That’s why it’s become so popular for organizations of many kinds (*including* churches) to have a “mission statement,” so everybody knows the purpose and plan, and can pull together toward a common goal.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of that donkey (on the first Palm Sunday), the people who were watching had a number of different goals in mind for him.

The crowds that were cheering him on that day waved palm branches like flags. They threw coats on the ground to form sort of a red carpet. And they welcomed and acclaimed him as the Son of David who “**came in the name of the Lord.**” (John 12:13) True, not everybody who was there in Jerusalem that day shared that conviction. A lot of the people who saw what Jesus was doing “held themselves back” and didn’t really commit themselves one way or the other. But to *these* folks (who we heard about in this reading)—there was *no* doubt in their minds that Jesus was the Messiah who God had promised so long ago, to send.

- They understood that he was a prophet, who spoke God’s Word with power.
- They recognized him as a king, in the spirit and line of David.
- They accepted him as God-in-the-flesh (Immanuel!)—the One who gave them bread, and healed their diseases, and calmed the forces of nature, and even raised the dead.

YES!—these people thought—Jesus *really and truly IS* the Saviour who will defeat the hated Romans, and bring Israel back to that ancient and glorious freedom it used to enjoy as a sovereign and independent nation! As you may remember: Even as late as the time of Jesus’ ascension (40 days after Easter), his own disciples were still asking, “**Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**” (Acts 1:6) They remembered what Zechariah had foreseen, centuries earlier, when he wrote: “**Behold, your king is coming to you, riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**” Well—*here he was*, right? That “**great crowd**” that John tells us was there that day (that first Palm Sunday) *definitely* had a purpose and goal in mind for Jesus. He was going to be their king.

Others, though, were not so happy about what they were seeing, as they watched that parade unfold in front of them. They saw this “king” on a donkey as a dangerous rival. As we heard at the end of our processional Gospel, the Pharisees complained to each other: **“Look, this is getting us nowhere! The whole world has gone after him!”** (John 12:19) Earlier, those Pharisees had called a meeting of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Ruling Council) to discuss their own purposes and plans for Jesus. As we heard last Sunday, they knew very well that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead—and that more and more people were putting their trust in him, because of that. **“If we let him go on like this,”** those Pharisees told each another, **“everyone will believe in him—and then the Romans will come and take away both our place [that is, the Temple] and our nation!”** (John 11:48) That fear led the high priest, Caiaphas, to “speak more truth” than he himself was even aware of, when he told all those fellow-members of the Sanhedrin that **“it would be better for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to perish.”** (John 11:50) **“From that day on,”** John says, those religious authorities **“plotted to take Jesus’ life.”** (John 11:53) They too had a purpose and goal in mind for Jesus. He was going to die.

So the crowds had one purpose in mind for Jesus, and the religious leaders had another. Jesus himself had a purpose too—the purpose and plan of his heavenly Father. The religious leaders cooked up *their* plan for Jesus’ death shortly after the raising of Lazarus. But *God’s* plan for Jesus was already firmly established **“before the foundation of the world,”** according to what Peter tells us in his first letter. (1 Peter 1:20) It’s true that Jesus himself was *very reluctant* to *share* that plan with anybody (even his own disciples), in the very early stages of his ministry, while he was still “getting himself established.” But as soon as the time was right, he began to speak *openly* about that purpose and plan his Father had for him. As we heard a couple of Wednesdays ago (in one of our midweek services), **“Jesus began to *show* his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and teachers of the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”** (Matthew 16:21) That fit perfectly with what he had already told Nicodemus, in our Gospel reading a few Sundays ago—that **“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.”** (John 3:14) And it was because Jesus *understood* his Father’s purpose and plan *so well* (all the way along), that he *accepted* this opportunity the crowds gave him, on Palm Sunday, *TO* ride right on ahead, straight into the hands of his enemies. As we heard in today’s Epistle reading, Jesus *submitted* to his Father’s purpose, and **“become obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** (Philippians 2:8)

At the end of that first, original Holy Week, 2000 years ago, all 3 of these “cross purposes” came together—there, *at* the cross.

- As we’ll hear in a few minutes, our Saviour’s enemies saw him die, nailed to that Roman cross they had been hoping he would end up on. As Caiaphas had unwittingly prophesied, **“one man *did* die there, for all the people.”**
- On their part, the crowd that had hailed Jesus as their hero on Palm Sunday, now turned their backs on him—**“hurling insults at him”** for *failing* to be the glorious **“King of Israel”** *they* wanted him to be. (Matt 27:39) **“Come on down from the cross,”** they said—**“If you *are* the Son of God!”** (Matt 27:40)
- But even so, both of *those* “cross purposes” were subject to the one, single, *eternal* purpose of God. To him, Jesus was (and always had been, and always would be) the promised Messiah—the “King on a cross,” the Lamb of God that was sacrificed, *there* on the cross, for the sins of the whole world.

A month and a half later (on the day of Pentecost), this is what Peter preached about Jesus, to the crowds who God was giving a second chance to: **“Men of Israel,”** Peter said, **“Hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth was a man who was *accredited* to you by God, through miracles and wonders**

**and signs, which God himself did among you through him (as you yourselves know!). This man was handed-over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. And you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, *freeing* him from the agony of death, because it was *impossible* for death to keep its hold on him.”**  
(Acts 2:22-24)

So *YES*—there were *many purposes* that *people* had in mind for Jesus that day. But “at the end of the day” it was only *God's* purpose that really mattered: *his* plan for *our* salvation, which was *fulfilled* in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

What would *your purpose* have been for Jesus, if *you* had been there on that first Palm Sunday?

- It's interesting to think about that—but more important to know and remember *the whole story!*
- In fact, the *even-better* question for you and me to think about today is: “What is God's purpose for *us?*”

Thankfully, Jesus himself answered that question very clearly when he told his first disciples: “**This is the will of my Father: that everyone who looks to the Son, and believes in him, shall have eternal life—and I will raise them up on the last day.**” (John 6:40)

On the cross *and* at the empty tomb, the purpose of God was *fulfilled*—for us! Thanks be to God! Amen.