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Glen Ridge Congregational Church

What Are You Cheering For?



Sunday, March 29, 2026
Matthew 21:1 – 11

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

On this Palm Sunday, our nation has been at war with Iran for 30 days. It was on February 28th that the United States and Israel first launched coordinated air strikes against Iran. Since the beginning of the war, Iran has retaliated with missile and drone strikes against US targets in the region, and civilian and military targets in Israel. It has targeted the glittering cities of Dubai and Qatar, and energy

infrastructure across the region. It has also closed the Straits of Hormuz through which 20% of the world's oil supply is shipped.

As of yesterday, over 3,300 people have died in the war, mostly in Iran and in Lebanon. 13 service members from our own armed forces have been killed. The war is costing us about 1 billion dollars a day.

It is hard to say exactly why we are at war with Iran, as the reasons that our government has given us for the war have shifted over time: it is supposed to destroy Iran's nuclear program; it is supposed to result in a regime change that would allow the people of Iran a greater freedom than they have known for decades; it is supposed to degrade Iran's missile capabilities that threaten its neighbors. Perhaps it is supposed to do all of these things.

Although the United States and Israel achieved air superiority in the skies of Iran quickly, killed many of the leaders of Iran, including its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and have greatly degraded Iran's missile capabilities, there has been no regime change in Iran, and Iran's nuclear material, which many fear will be used to make nuclear weapons, is still controlled by them. Perhaps because of these reasons 2,500 additional US Marines landed in the Middle East yesterday. They were joined by another 2,500 sailors from our Navy.

And although there have begun to be some regional diplomatic meetings and there are rumored to be back-channel discussions happening between the US and Iran, there appear to be no formal meetings to bring the war between our nations to an end at this time.

These are some of the facts of the war our nation is engaged in on this Palm Sunday, the day when we remember Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, when the people of that city welcomed Jesus shouting "Hosanna" and wondered if he might be the one to finally bring them a peace and prosperity that they had waited centuries to receive.

Although we are only 30 days into our war with Iran, perhaps on this Palm Sunday, we too pray for peace. Perhaps we too hope that Jesus can show us the way to ending this war. Perhaps on this Palm Sunday, we can fully understand the shouts and the cries of "Hosanna" that the people of Jerusalem, all those years ago, greet Jesus with. Because "Hosanna" means "God save us". It is the cry of a people exhausted by war and oppression. It is the cry of a people who feel that God has been silent too long, and perhaps no longer cares. It is the cry of a people who feel powerless and who are losing their hope in their future and what kind of world they will leave to their children.

It is their Palm Sunday cry, and it is our Palm Sunday cry.

But, I wonder if Jesus heard our shout of "Hosanna" on this Palm Sunday, our prayer to be saved, I wonder if he might turn to us and say, if all you pray for is the end of this war you haven't gone far enough; you haven't understood who I am. Look at me. Look and see.

The Christ enters Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. He rides not on a stallion as a military conquering hero would, but as a peasant. He is greeted at the gates of the city not by the religious and political

and military elites, but by the ordinary people; by the children. He carries no sword, and no shield.

We're told in Ephesians that when the Christ emptied itself out of the heavens and chose where and how it incarnated in our world it chose a no-name town, to no-name parents, to be born a no-name child.

And it is in this unremarkability that Christ is nothing less than the icon of God's weakness that is the undoing of all of our belief in our aircraft carriers, and bombs, and smart weapons, and stealth fighters, and assassinations, and spies, in the power of our petrol dollars, and our nuclear weapons.

Because Christ isn't simply the good ruler God is swapping in for the bad one. Christ is God's manifest critique of humanity's economy of power, our belief in its efficacy and its necessity. God sends us on this Palm Sunday, when we are at war with Iran, not another "better" president, not another more "successful" general, but a peasant on a donkey, received by nobodies. And God tells us this is our salvation. This is the answer to the hosannas we have been crying out for.

And for a moment we can almost believe it.

For a moment we can almost see a different world out of the corner of our eye.

But then it is gone. Because our addiction to power is too great. Our anxiety about losing power is too powerful. And we begin almost instantaneously to believe again in the power of armies, and in the need to kill and silence, and in the efficacy of intimidation and in the

convenience of apathy, because this is the story of Holy Week, the week we are now entering. It is a story of how a people welcomes an itinerant powerless preacher riding on a donkey with shouts of “Hosanna,” and within a week those same people will shout “Crucify him”. It is a story about the vagaries and weaknesses of our human hearts. It is a story that tells the truth, by exposing all of the lies we won’t admit to ourselves.

And it is also a story of how we are loved and forgiven through all of it, by the one who will die because of our lies about and our addictions to power.

It is a story of the man named Jesus. It is the story of the one we call the Crucified.

Amen.