29th March 2026 – Palm Sunday

Everything

"It wasn't just the children who shouted out His name."

Tom Gordon, *It wasn't just the children*

On Palm Sunday, churches hand out palm branches and children wave them in celebration. But why? A child in a school where I was the chaplain suggested that, because it was hot, they waved palm branches to cool Jesus down! I wasn't sure how to respond to that!

Of the four Gospel accounts of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, only John mentions palm branches. For a start, they were plentiful. Date palms were common in the region, the most accessible choice for a public demonstration. Had Jesus entered another city, it's likely they would have used different branches. But John, a theologian, takes us beyond the obvious. For palm branches also symbolise triumph. When Roman generals returned victorious from battle, they were often greeted with palm branches. Palm branches represented victory, peace and celebration. The people of Jerusalem were seeing Jesus as a victorious King.

But even more than *that*, palm branches were familiar in Jewish religious festivals, especially during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot). The book of Leviticus gives the people of God this guidance:

And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.

Palm branches, therefore, are a symbol of rejoicing and welcoming the Messiah, a metaphor the people would readily understand.

So … common usage; a re-enactment of a Roman Triumph; an event full of religious symbolism. But, even more remarkably, the palm branches are a pointer beyond Holy Week to the glory that is to come. In Revelation, we're told a huge crowd stands before God holding palm branches:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10 NKJV).

Here is Love, in victory, glory and triumph. Palm Sunday has everything.

A prayer for today

Everything? Perhaps. But then, amazingly, there's even more to come …

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