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Have you ever been in a situation where you want to make a comment about something, but you're not sure what others might think? Maybe you notice the proverbial "elephant in the room," but you're not sure if anyone else noticed it, and you're concerned what might happen if you point it out.

Did you notice the "elephant" in Luke's story of Palm Sunday? There are no palm branches. Not one. Not even a leafy branch, as Mark's Gospel tells us, or branches cut from trees in Matthew's version. Only John refers to palm branches. That means only one out of four Gospels refers directly to palm branches.

Three of the four Gospel stories have in common, however, the throwing of coats on the ground, so maybe we should call this "Coat Sunday." All four have Jesus riding a young donkey, so we could celebrate "Donkey Sunday," but that may lead people to think of Donkey Basketball where teams ride around on donkeys and try to get the ball through the hoop, so I think we might want to avoid that imagery.

But what about this? All four Gospels have the crowd singing a refrain from Psalm 118: "Blessed is

the one who comes in the name of the Lord," so we could call it Psalm Sunday. That has a nice ring to it, doesn't it? Psalm Sunday.

Each Gospel writer adds his own twist to the crowd's singing of this Psalm—Matthew celebrates the Son of David, while Mark refers to the coming kingdom of our ancestor David. John refers to the King of Israel, while Luke rephrases the Psalm to "Blessed is the *king* who comes in the name of the Lord."

All the imagery points to a royal procession—the donkey, coats, palm branches, Son of David, and language of a king. The crowd is filled with expectation; this person entering the city will do something amazing.

With all this different imagery from the four narratives in our Bible, it's not surprising that they all merge in our minds. It may be especially confusing for children, such as one Sunday school teacher who was trying to help the children understand the story.

The teacher was extremely enthusiastic. She looked at the class of four-year-olds and asked this question: "Does anyone know what today is?"

A little girl held up her finger and said, "Yes, today is Palm Sunday."

The teacher exclaimed, “That’s fantastic. That’s wonderful. Now does anyone know what next Sunday is?”

The same little girl held up her finger. She said, “Yes, next Sunday is Easter Sunday.”

Once again the teacher said “That’s fantastic. Now, does anyone know what makes next Sunday Easter?”

The same little girl responded and said, “Yes, next Sunday is Easter because Jesus rose from the grave.” Before the teacher could congratulate her, the girl kept on talking and said, “But if he sees his shadow, he has to go back in for seven weeks.”¹

Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem riding on a donkey was a parade of healing, bringing hope to people who had endured the oppression of numerous unjust governments for centuries. By riding on a humble donkey rather than a war horse, Jesus proclaimed that his Way would differ from previous leaders, that he offered healing rather than war.

Here near the end of Jesus’ life, this healing parade seems to echo a different kind of parade that occurred near the beginning of his ministry. Jesus was teaching in a house where a large crowd

had gathered. Some friends brought a man who could not walk by carrying him on a stretcher. When they could get not through the crowd, they hoisted him on the roof, created an opening in the roof, and lowered him down to Jesus. In a sense, they had created a healing parade—first, by carrying him to Jesus, and then, by lowering him to Jesus.

These two stories seem to serve as bookends of Jesus’ ministry of healing: a parade with a man on a stretcher near the beginning, and then a parade with Jesus on a donkey near the end. During Lent this year we have caught a glimpse of several stories of healing in between these bookend stories: a leper with a skin disease healed, a government official pleading that Jesus heal his servant, two blind men received sight and a man who could not speak was restored to health, and a religious leader asking for healing for his daughter, who had to wait while Jesus healed a woman who was bleeding. Last week we looked beyond the healing of our bodies to how we can participate with God in offering healing to our Earth. From physical health to mental health to earthly health, God strives to bring healing to all the world.

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Sometimes we know, however, that healing does not occur in the way we hope. The admired Disciples preacher Fred Craddock struggled with this himself when his sister was ill. Fred wrote:

When my sister Frieda, my only sister, was dying of cancer, I had gone back to visit and knew that the time there would be the last time I would see her. She asked me to help her prepare the funeral service, which I found extremely, extremely difficult to do. When we finished preparing the service, she asked me to pray, and this is what I did. I located myself, I located myself straight in front of the throne. Before I closed my eyes, I wanted to make sure I was in front of the throne, because what I wanted was God the throne, God the power, God the almighty. All things are possible with God.

When I had positioned myself straight in front of the throne, I bowed my head and prayed for her relief and for her healing as intensely and sincerely as I could, and I closed with Amen. I lifted my head, opened my eyes, and I was in front of the bleeding lamb. Now, who wants that? And she died.

¹ Hodgkin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for*

There it is. God the power, God the one who identifies with us and suffers with us. You won't find a better picture in all the Bible than here.²

That is the part of healing we often forget—that Christ suffers with us, never leaving us alone, offering a healing we sometimes cannot see in this world. Even though the palm leaves have withered and died after his entrance into Jerusalem, Christ's parade of healing continues around us, offering hope to the world. Even through this week continues the story of Jesus' suffering and death on a cross, and even though we continue to live in a pandemic, Jesus continues to enter humbly into our lives. The path ahead may seem unclear, filled with obstacles and dangers, uncertainties and struggles, but Jesus promises to always be with us. So, let's join the parade of healing and offer hope to everyone we greet this Holy Week as we journey to the cross, anticipating the joy of Easter at the end of the parade of healing.

Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #304.

² Fred B. Craddock; Mike Graves; Richard F. Ward. *Craddock Stories* (Kindle Locations 1803-1809). Kindle Edition.