I believe that what we did today when we processed around the sanctuary waving palm branches was really, really, important. I believe that what we did today when we sang and shouted “Hosanna” was really, really, important.

My hunch is that some of us have come into worship this week after having a difficult week. Some of us may have had a great week. If you had a great week this week, then you should have a reason to celebrate in worship this week. And you should feel good about that. I hope that many of us have had a refreshing and fulfilling week in lots of ways.

But some of us have a tough week. It could be tough for what may seem mundane. Maybe the weather impacted your plans in a negative way. There is a lot of sickness going around. Maybe you or your kids or your parents got sick and that changed some plans that you had.

Maybe you had some unexpected news this week and it has really made it a tough week for you. I hesitate to start naming what may have happened to some of us this week.

It may have been something pretty rough or it may have been something that was rough for you that others just would not understand. Sometimes our pain is personal and no one else can understand what it is like to be in our shoes. But some of us had a tough week.

Of course, we all know that April 15th is tomorrow. The week before taxes are due can put lots of us in bad moods. Some of us have had a tough week.

Today is Palm Sunday and begins what we call Holy Week. If you ever wonder if God understands what it is like to have a tough week, then all we need to do is to begin to read the story that makes up Holy Week. Holy Week is what we call the last week of the life that Jesus lived on earth.

Our first reading this morning recalls the Palm Sunday procession. We read the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem when he says that he needs a donkey. Jesus being recorded in the Bible as needing something is very rare.

But Palm Sunday begins with Jesus saying that he needs a donkey. Some point to the similarities to the prophet Zechariah and that Jesus needing this donkey is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

The donkey is brought to him and Luke says that Jesus rides on top of it as he enters Jerusalem. As he rides in, the gospel writer Luke says that the people start to spread their garments on the road in front of Jesus. Interestingly, the gospel of Luke does not say that the people are waving Palm branches like the other gospels record.

Luke also leaves out the crowd shouting the words “Hosanna.” If we want a biblical record to turn to for our traditional Palm Sunday procession, we will not find it in Luke but rather in Matthew, Mark, and John. But, anyway, Jesus processes in and the people are shouting words of joy.

“Blessed is the king!! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” Sounds like Christmas all over again. Some of the religious leaders in the crowd beg Jesus to calm the crowd. But Jesus does not calm the crowd. Instead, Jesus says, if you try to tell this crowd to be quiet then even the stones will shout out words of joy.

It is a time of great joy and great anticipation. But according to Luke, the shouts of joy quickly turn dark. Luke records the very next action of Jesus being this, “as he came into Jerusalem, he wept over it.” Jesus then enters the temple and drives out people who are using the temple for financial gain. We then read that the religious leaders are plotting ways to kill Jesus.

Jesus spends some time teaching in Jerusalem and then he gathers with his disciples to celebrate the Passover meal. This Passover meal is the highlight of the Jewish religious faith. A time to celebrate God’s deliverance from slavery. But at this Passover meal Jesus shares bread with his disciples and acknowledges that one of them will betray him.

Things continue to break apart at this meal as the disciples argue with one another about which one of them is the greatest. After the meal, Jesus walks to the Mount of Olives to pray and he asks for God to remove this cup from him and spare him what he is about to go through. While he is praying, the disciples fall asleep.

Jesus then shares with Simon Peter that Peter will deny him three times before the end of the day and Peter says no way. But that is exactly what Peter does. Peter, when asked, denies three times that he has a relationship with Jesus.

And then we read that Jesus is brought before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. The religious leaders appear before Pilate and misrepresent what Jesus has said and done. Pilate tries to say that Jesus has done nothing wrong and tries to pass off the responsibility to Herod.

But ultimately the crowd forces Pilate’s hand and demands that Jesus suffer crucifixion. Jesus is then beaten and ultimately hung on a cross to die.

And we think we have had a bad week? When we have our bad weeks, we can always compare our bad week to the last week that Jesus endured on earth. No pain that we will ever endure will ever compare to what Jesus endured.

Knowing about this very difficult week that Jesus endured, why is it important that we gather today and wave palm branches and shout “hosanna?” Some argue that Jesus needed to hear the shouts of praise from the crowd to help to sustain him through the difficult days ahead.

Some argue that the voices of praise rang in Jesus ear as he endured what he endured. Some argue that the praise was an affirmation from the crowd that some people did get it.

So, what if it is important that we participate in Palm Sunday because we are participating in a very holy act. By waving our branches and by shouting hosanna, we are joining in with God who affirms for us that God knows about our tough weeks. But that together, with God’s help, we will get through it.

What if, by waving our branches, we are affirming that what Jesus did has made an impact on our lives in some way. That we have gotten a glimpse of the humanity and divinity of Jesus and that we are joining with him and celebrating the impact that he has made upon the earth.

But maybe we think that its not really all that important to participate in a worshipping community on Palm Sunday. But do you remember what Jesus said about those that choose not to participate?

Jesus says that if you go silent, then the stones of the ground will be forced to shout out instead. In other words, something is going to be shouting out and acknowledging God’s presence and it might as well be us.

We may have thought that waving palm branches was cute. And it is. But waving palm branches is a holy act. A holy act that affirms that the life and death of Jesus really does make an impact on our life and the life of others.

Hosanna. Blessed in the king who comes in the name of the Lord! AMEN.

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-Given: April 14, 2019 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)

-Text: Luke 19:29-40, 23:1-49