

**“INSUFFICIENT PRAISE”**  
**A Sermon Preached at**  
**FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**Belleville, IL**  
**By the Rev. Rob Dyer**  
**April 13, 2025**  
(transcribed from audio file)

Our scripture reading for today is from the book of John 12:12-19.

*The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,*

*‘Hosanna!*

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—  
the King of Israel!’*

*Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:*

*‘Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.*

*Look, your king is coming,  
sitting on a donkey’s colt!’*

*His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. The Pharisees then said to one another, ‘You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!’* NRSV

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I am convinced that if we were to do a modern-day retelling of this Palm Sunday scene that Jesus would not process into Jerusalem on a donkey. Instead he would arrive in Jerusalem on Frontier Airlines. I say this because last week when I was not here with you, I went down to Tampa, Florida where my daughter’s boyfriend lives. We met up with her and him down there in Tampa, Florida and we flew Frontier Airlines.

Now I don't know if you've had that experience yourself, but it is very cheap and you get what you pay for. Every single dollar of it. It reminds me of this scene because when Jesus rode the donkey, they took off their cloaks and put them all on top of the donkey so he could ride in. And I noticed that the people in line to get on the plane had like seven layers of clothes that they were wearing. They're headed to Florida, but they don't want to check any luggage cause the way Frontier Airlines works is that your ticket costs like this much, but if you want to take a bag with you, it costs this much. So, everybody is trying to wear as much as they can, cram everything else into small backpacks, sneaking bags underneath coats so that they can't be seen by the people who are checking you in. The procession goes on to the plane, but the discounts just keep happening.

When you get to your seat you find it's not a normal airplane seat. On Frontier Airlines it's lawn furniture. The seats look like lawn furniture. I sat down in this thing, and I thought okay I'm just going to get some sleep and I'm looking for the button to recline it. Here's another nifty feature. The seats on Frontier Airlines do not recline cause they're lawn chairs. When I got home I didn't know that and I just thought I was the idiot and I didn't know how to do it, so I'm looking up online, how do you recline a seat and the web site from Frontier Airlines explains it this way. The seats on our flights are pre-reclined for you. I didn't realize that instead of sitting here, I was actually sitting here.

Then the snack cart came by, and I said, "Oh good. I'm a little thirsty." Well, wait for it! If you would like a soda and a little bag of pretzels, that'll be \$7.00 on a Frontier Airlines flight. Yeah! Disney prices!

And then I thought I'm just not gonna spend seven bucks, that's ridiculous. I'm just going to get some sleep, but the pre-reclined seat did not make it easy for me to sleep so I thought instead I'm gonna put down the tray table and just put my head down. What I found, the ergonomic design of a Frontier Airlines flight is such that when you put down the tray table and try to put your head down on it, it's an advanced yoga move getting your forehead down and I couldn't do it. So yeah!

But you know I can complain all I want about this, but at the end of the day if you can get a flight for less than \$100 somewhere, you know. I personally would do it all differently. I'd charge a normal airfare but then when I get on the plane they go, "Oh, Mr. Dyer, if you choose not to recline your seat, we'll give you \$25." OK. "Oh, here's the snack cart. If you choose not to have it, I'll hand you \$7 cash." OK. Right? How about, if you don't check luggage, we'll just hand you another \$50. If they would do it that way I would feel so much better about these things.

You see, this is what happens. So often we're handed a blessing, the idea of this inexpensive flight to be taken somewhere, but all I find is a way to complain about it. All I find is a way to want the blessing just a little bit different – my own design.

And the same thing happened in this story that we're reading. I mean right now it sounds great. Jesus is coming to town. There's a crowd that comes with him and there is a festival that is going on, so there would have been a lot of arrival of crowds into Jerusalem at this time. So, this might have been the crowd that just came with Jesus, that heard about what he had done. It also says that some of the people in the town had heard about what Jesus had done, so they came out to greet him as well, with palm branches waving which is a sign of victory – a victorious moment, to celebrate.

He comes into town, and I think what they really wanted, they really wanted someone to get rid of those Romans. I mean they weren't looking for a savior who was going to come and die on a cross for their sins. What they wanted was someone to get rid of the Romans. Sure! Great! A king has come! Would have been nice if you were on a war horse with an army, but we'll take the donkey. Partly because it did fulfill the scripture. In Zacaria 9:9 it says those very words. It says your king will come on a donkey, on a colt, so okay, it's fulfillment of scripture, but still they weren't looking for someone to come in humble. They were looking for someone to come in strong. And they got Jesus.

The celebration of his coming seems a little off because I remember when I was a kid and I would go through this Easter week, I remember thinking quite often, and also as an adult, isn't it weird that the crowd was shouting "Hosanna! Hosanna!" which literally means save us. Save us! The crowd is doing that and just a couple of days later they are yelling "Crucify him!" Well honestly, we don't know if it's the same crowd. And if you look at the pattern of what happened to the disciples, all those enthusiastic followers, well when things started getting a little rough for Jesus, they tend to just creep off real quiet like, like Peter. "Oh no. I don't know that guy. Huh Uh!"

So, it's quite possible the followers just shrunk off and the others – "This guy's causing trouble. We don't need trouble and he's obviously not going to deliver the goods that we want." It just seemed like it didn't match. But we're like that though.

We like blessings and we like blessings a certain way and we want them to satisfy the problems that we're having. The fact that what Jesus was coming to do was so much bigger than the everyday problems which Jesus knew. "Look. I'm going to

take care of the heavy lifting here. All of the brokenness in the world. All that sin has done to separate us from one another and from God. I'm gonna heal that and give you a chance, give you a ministry, give you a mission to be a part of."

They wanted a king to roll in and just take care of the Romans. We'll be here. Instead, they got someone who took care of the bigger picture and then invited them to join in the ministry and mission, to address the suffering and the pain in the world.

You know right now there is a lot of talk in the news about efficiency. We're gonna make everything more efficient. Right? So, I have an idea and see if you all put me in charge of this. As a pastor instead of being in charge of a department of government efficiency, I'd like to be put in charge of a department of Godly efficiency, where we take care of the kind of things that I think God would really like to see us take care of.

For instance, we have food insecurity right here in our country. Like just for a moment, let's be selfish and forget about the whole world, just the United States of America. We have food insecurity right here in our country. We could take care of that. We'd love it if someone would just roll in – I don't care, horse, donkey, you could ride a turtle for all I care. You just take care of all the stuff for me. But the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ invites us to be part of that. So you got that problem going on.

Also, homelessness. Homelessness is a huge epidemic across our nation. I mean, I don't think anyone would ever get elected if they said, "This is what I'm going to do. If you put me in office, I will get rid of hunger and homelessness." I don't know if I could get elected. But that seems like a Godly efficiency to me.

Now I'm going to move into a portion of the sermon now where all of you who really don't like numbers, or math, I'm gonna need you to maybe just check out for a little bit. You can start doing your list for the day and then when I get past all the math, I'm going to clap my hands three times and that's going to let you know you can come back, and I'll give you a summary that doesn't involve any math. Is that a deal? Now some of you I know, you're numbers people, you're math nerds like me. You're gonna love this part.

Here's the thing. What about this food insecurity problem that we have. Estimates are that it would take somewhere between 15 & 30 billion dollars a year to take care of. Oh my gosh. That's a huge number. Isn't that a big number? That's a big number. 15-30 billion per year to take care of that.

And then homelessness, the estimate is somewhere between 20 & 30 billion dollars per year to take care of homelessness in our country. Let's just say 25 apiece. 50 billion dollars a year it would take to solve this. This seems like it would be impossible to address. Well, let's just look at our own country filled with Christians and non-Christians and all that alike.

The total wealth of all of us in the United States is a mere 160 trillion dollars. Our wealth. What we have. What we steward over. Each of us. All of us together. Now out of the 160 the top 1% has about 50 trillion out of the 160 trillion. About 30% the top 1%. The bottom 50% has about 4 trillion. I guess 2 ½%. Not much, so let's go after this problem and we'll let the bottom 50% of the nation not do anything cause they've got such a small amount. So, what's left? All the rest of us in that 50 to 99, about 106 trillion. So, all together, us and the top 1%, we've got 156 trillion dollars worth of wealth. 156 trillion. Wow!

When I was first starting out I didn't have a lot of money, a lot of extra money to put away but I found out that Discover Card had this Discover Online Savings account, and you could put money into it, and it would give you 3.7% interest. That's not bad. You're not killing the market but that's fine. Here's the interesting thing.

If you went to just that top 50% and you said, "Could you give me 0.86% of your wealth? Not even 1%. 0.86% of your wealth. I could put it in that Discover account and at that interest rate, the interest alone would solve hunger and homelessness in our country. 0.86%! That's not impressive, is it?

Do you remember the story where Zakeus and Jesus and Zakeus wanted to see Jesus and he said "Zakeus, I'm going to come to your house" and Zakeus comes down from the tree and he says "Lord, I want to give 0.86% of all that I have to help the poor." No! He said half. He said half.

And then there was that rich man who came to Jesus and he asked, "what must I do to enter the kingdom of heaven?" And Jesus said, "Well you should obey all the Commandments and do all this."

He said "Oh. I've done all that, Jesus."

Jesus said, "Well, then sell all of your possessions and give the money to the poor."

That was 100%. He said, "Can't do that" and walks off.

Wouldn't it have been much less impressive if Jesus had said to the rich man, "How about you just give 0.86%?" Not 100%. Would he still have walked off? I don't know.

But you know what? We can't get everybody to do that. What if only the Christians did it? Yeah. We'll let the heathens off. Okay? Just the Christians! Just the Christians! That means all of us Christians would have to give up 1.56% of our wealth. Now here's the interesting thing about it.

If we took all that money and we tossed it in the Discover Savings account and earned that little 3.7% interest – boom boom boom boom. After a year or two the healthcare industry would notice something. Because if you eliminate hunger and homelessness there is a drastic reduction in cost to our healthcare system. So much so that there would be a surplus. They would find out it is cheaper now for you to take care of these people who are fed and have homes.

So, once they figured that out, we could take all that money in the Discover account and we could give it back to you. So, to solve hunger and homelessness in America, the top 50% Christians would have to be willing to give up 1.5% of their wealth for maybe two years and then get it all back.

So, when we think about what God has done in this world and we go, look at all the suffering and it's still there. Honestly, I think Jesus gets off the donkey and looks at us and says, "Are you kidding me? I'm taking care of the big stuff – the brokenness in this world, and your relationship with God, the sin that invades so much of our life that I'm covering that with a sacrifice so that you need not worry about that. It gives the gift of blessing, salvation and all I'm asking for you to do is to join in the ministry and mission because I've given you all that you need to take care of these problems. You just gotta be willing to give up 1.56% for two years and you could take care of all these things you keep blaming God for not taking care of all the hunger in their country or all the homelessness in our country.

Don't you see what has happened here is that we have been given this incredible blessing, given this incredible ministry and mission and we're just complaining about the discount. You mean I still gotta put some effort in? I can't just sit back and you'll take care of the Romans and the homelessness, and the hunger, and the injustice? No.

Jesus took care of the big stuff so that you and I could be inspired and invited into the beautiful ministry and mission to care for one another. To love one another as

Christ has loved us. That's it. And honestly God looks at what we're doing and says, "What you're giving is insufficient praise because you're offering, you're addressing, you're jumping in. It's insufficient. My grace is sufficient for your salvation but your offering of what you're doing with it is insufficient praise.

Now I know right now some of you are thinking, I like coming to this church and Pastor Rob always makes me feel really good after. I can go out into . . . I've got a better day and I'm here to tell you like I'm sorry, but this sermon is a two parter. And if you want to hear about the good news you gotta come for Easter next week. This is Holy Week. And there is a journey we need to go on, a journey of realizing the sacrifice that Christ made, a journey of realizing that we on our own are insufficient. We're all that is needed, so that we meet Jesus at the cross realizing our insufficiency was met by the perfect nature of Jesus Christ and by that sacrifice we are now invited to participate as imperfect, faulty, messy followers.

In the scripture even the disciples didn't get what was going on, so if you want the second part, you gotta come back next week. But on the way there I think it's good for us to enter into a Holy Week where maybe we even show up at Good Friday and we allow that message to land on us. But it's so heavy. It's kind of a depressing service. Waa, waa, waa. Somebody died for your sins. All right? I mean, however you celebrate it, whether at a service or just through your own preparation this week.

It's okay for us to walk through Holy Week with a little heaviness, with a little feeling of being insufficient, with realizing that we don't have the willpower to take care of this stuff that we've been given all the resources we need to take care of. That's us. It sounds like we need a Savior. It sounds like we need someone that we can let guide our steps and show us the way. I think that's a good thing to carry on our journey through Holy Week.

To God be the glory.

Halleluiah and Amen.