

Breaking the Spell

Matthew 21:1-17

On Friday night I went to see the Concordia College production of Shrek the Musical. Two of our Confirmees had the lead roles: Daniel and Addie. It was fantastic. Did anyone here go and see the musical? How many of you have seen the original Shrek movie?

For those who haven't seen it, Shrek is an animated movie . . . a fairy tale which overturns many of the usual fairy tale conventions. Shrek is a green ogre who is often misunderstood by people . . . he's a kind of anti-hero. He is sent on a mission, disguised as a knight, to rescue Princess Fiona from the clutches of a dragon. Along the way he befriends a donkey called Donkey! When the Princess finds out who it is who's come to rescue her she rejects him and refuses to go with him. But, Shrek won't be deterred from his mission and he rescues her anyway. But, Princess Fiona is hiding a secret of her own she doesn't want anyone to know . . . she has been placed under a spell that turns her into a green ogre every night. Only true love will break the spell.

That's Shrek. But, isn't that Palm Sunday too?

Jesus is sent on a mission . . . God disguised as a human being . . . he comes to Jerusalem . . . with a donkey (!) . . . he come to rescue people from the clutches of the dragon of sin. For although the people look beautiful and holy and religious, underneath they hide a secret, a secret they don't like to talk about . . . that within them is an ugliness that traps them and stops them from being the people they could be. Jesus too is misunderstood by the people . . . he's not who they want him to be. In fact, Jesus overturns many of the usual conventions about who God is . . . and he literally overturns the tables of the money changers in God's house! And, when the people find out who it is that's come to rescue them, that he's not who they thought he was, they reject him and refuse to follow him! But, Jesus refuses to be deterred from his mission and he rescues them anyway. And, he does it out of love. For love is the only thing that can break the spell of sin and death.

Love . . . not romantic love . . . it's more like the love a parent has for a child . . . a love that will protect and defend . . . a love that will support and nurture and sacrifice . . . like driving the child to Confirmation classes every Thursday evening, even after a long day! It's a love that aches to see the child be the best person they can be . . . a love that yearns to grow in closer relationship with the child . . . a love that would give up its life for the sake of the child. That's God's love. That's why Jesus rides into Jerusalem. That's why I am glad you are here this morning, Addie, Amelia, James and Daniel!

And, the same goes for the rest of you . . . I am glad you are here so I can tell you again the story of God's love. God's love that refuses to be distracted, or put off, from his rescue mission . . . even when he knows his love is going to be misunderstood and rejected . . . God's love that aches to see you be the best person you can be . . . God's love that yearns to grow in relationship with you . . . God's love that sacrifices everything for you.

So, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on his way to be crucified . . . on his way to take on the ugliness of all our sin . . . on his way to spread out his arms on the cross as if to say: “This is how much I love you”!

This, above all else, is why we are a community . . . because we have received and we have experienced God’s love. And, this is why we come together so often . . . to share God’s love . . . to encourage one another in God’s love . . . because we need to hear about it over and over again . . . and we need to receive it over and over again, because only God’s love can break the spell of sin and death . . . and only through God’s love can we be the people we were meant to be.

So, this morning, Addie, Amelia, Daniel and James you are not just children of Matthew and Daria, Beau and Zanna, Jannie and Emsie and Ben and Jacinda . . . no, this morning you are the children of all of us . . . you are children of this community . . . a community grounded and sustained by God’s love. I know you probably think one set of parents is enough to deal with, but when you stand up in a little while and share your faith statements with us no one here is going to be critiquing what you say . . . no, they will be proud of you, they will take joy in seeing what God’s love is doing in you, and they will be praising God for you . . . for today you speak for all of us as God’s children.

So, folks, when you hear these four young people share with us later, listen to what they say . . . but listen for more than that . . . listen for who they *are* . . . listen for the love of God in them . . . listen because they are you and you are them . . . we are children of God . . . children loved by God.

And, one more thing . . . Addie, Amelia, James and Daniel . . . this is a day of celebration . . . and we’re making a bit of a fuss over you . . . and rightly so . . . just like everyone made a bit of a fuss over Jesus when he entered into Jerusalem, but at the end of the day . . . when all the fuss was over Jesus just went home . . . well, he went out of the city to Bethany where he was staying. Palm Sunday wasn’t the end of the story for Jesus . . . there was more to come. There was more love to give.

So, when all the fuss is over for you today, you’ll go home and life will continue on as usual. Today doesn’t mean you’ve ‘made it’ . . . it doesn’t mean you’ve reached the pinnacle of being a Christian . . . today doesn’t mean you graduate . . . today is our celebration as a community of who you are and who we are . . . we are God’s children whom he loves and God wants to share more love with us . . . together . . . so that together we might be the people he has rescued us to be.

Amen.

Pastor John Strelan
St John’s Lutheran Church, Unley
Palm Sunday, 2026
(Including the Rite of Confirmation)