

PALM SUNDAY 2026

St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Arroyo Grande

The Ven. Douglas Edwards

What a wonderful day it is. Lots of celebration, clapping, making glad.

Have you heard the haunting call of a whale after it has breached the water? That call can be heard more than 10-miles away. Impressive, but when that whale dives deep into the ocean and reaches the SOFAR (Sound Fixing And Ranging) channel, or deep sound channel, that is where extraordinary happens as sound waves are refracted and channeled.

I first made a confession during Holy Week, in 1980. I shed tears and bore my soul. My confessor was a professor, Alan Jones, a tower in Anglican spirituality. It was a terrible difficult ordeal. He heard my words and then gave absolution. When done, my confessor said words I will never forget-- "Doug, go deeper."

"We will all be called as witnesses."

Welcome to Holy Week. We have arrived, finally. My task is to introduce Holy Week, offer some small consideration, and then get out of the way because the liturgy does the speaking.

Holy Week begins at the gate to Jerusalem as throngs welcome Jesus into the city using traditional means to welcome a King.

Some of you know that I am a king in Africa. I get this passage. I know what it is to have people lift you up and carry you and put palm fronds down in front of you, waving their white handkerchiefs crying "Hosanna, hosanna." And when we get to the palace, I am not allowed to touch the ground, so they lay garments, goat skins for me to walk on. I have to walk slowly because they don't have too many goatskins. They need to move the goatskins from back to front.

Do you know what it feels like to have that happen to you? It's not what we Americans are really used to. Talk about a "No Kings" march! Fraud, imposter, cultural appropriator, bewildered, honored—this wonderful stew of emotions and thoughts...so ripe for a spiritual downfall.

Jesus chooses to enter on a donkey covered with garments. It is not a mistake. It is very intentional because entering on a donkey is a sign of messianic kingship. Jesus has come to Jerusalem with purpose. Great forces are about to collide.

Liturgy, from the Greek *liturgia* means the work of the people. Palm Sunday is a little bit of a fiendish liturgy because it plays with our false hopes, forces us to give voice to our duplicity. There is a reason we will leave the sanctuary in silence today. We will have re-membered, given voice to our willingness to turn against God on a dime. We started today smiling, laughing, shouting "Hosanna" and singing, "All glory, laud, and honor to Thee, Redeemer King." We joyfully

re-enacted Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. But soon, I tell you, you will betray Him, Lord crying, "Crucify him, crucify him!" On this first day of Holy Week—in Jerusalem—we bear witness against ourselves.

On Tuesday Jesus will enter the temple with violence turning over the tables where money is exchanged. He proclaims that grifting in God's house will not be tolerated. With this action, his fate is sealed.

Wednesday brings the Stations of the Cross. This devotional practice traces the path Jesus walked on the day of His crucifixion, from His condemnation to His burial. (and resurrection.) It is designed as a spiritual pilgrimage, allowing believers to meditate on the suffering and sacrifice of Christ.

On Maundy Thursday, we return to Jerusalem as the parish hall becomes the upper room where Jesus and his disciples gathered. We share in His last meal. Mandatum Novum is Latin for "New Law or Commandment." Jesus gives His disciples, **and us**, a new law, that we should love one another as He loves us. STOP. There is that word again, love. This is also the night when Jesus institutes the Eucharist, and when he models humility and servitude by washing his disciple's feet. And we submit ourselves to having our feet washed.

We fall asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane while Jesus pleads that we pray with him. The olive trees bear witness to the truth of our spiritual laxity. Jesus is arrested. When we have emerged ourselves into the fullness of our sacred story, lent ends with a bang as we strip the altar and sanctuary, transforming it liturgically from a worship space to our Lord's tomb. We are witnesses and we are called to account.

The final liturgical celebration is Good Friday from the Old English, "God Friday," when once again the Passion Narrative is read, this time in the hours after Jesus has died, crucified outside of Jerusalem's wall. I am an avid golfer. I have a single hole-in-one. I got it playing with employees and clients. It was Good Friday. God is a jokester. Do you what it's like to be a priest and get a hole-in-one on Good Friday?

So when a whale bellows with full voice, the noise level reaches 180 decibels, the same as a 747- jet engine. Now when she dives to the deep-water sound channel, her call exploits this natural acoustic waveguide. Her voice can be heard not for 10 miles, or 50 miles. Beyond 100 miles, past 1000 miles. To put it in another way, a whale off the coast of Morrow Bay can chat up her cousins off the coasts of Japan, Australia, and India. The message takes 2 1/2 hours to arrive-- the 8000 miles. That's what happens when you go deeper.

Much of our life is spent responding to the surface chatter. Holy Week encourages, almost irresistibly draws us to a more profound place. Each of the Holy Week liturgies is a teleport, inviting us to dive deep and there listen for and call to God with a clarity and purity, to bear witness to the power of love. I invite you to a faithful celebration of Holy Week. Amen.