I find Palm Sunday to be one of the most confusing days on which to preach because our readings don’t seem to know when to stop. We read about Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the waving of the palms, which makes a lot of sense. But we also read about every other thing that happens in Holy Week save the Resurrection. Meaning that, in theory, I could preach a sermon concerning Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday or Holy Saturday all while having been faithful to the readings. And I apologize because I know that I have this rant most years, but it seems to me that the readings display an incredible lack of patience, like they just can’t wait to tell us what happens next. But since you are all holding palms, I think I will stick with what we are supposed to be remembering today – Palm Sunday. And as an added bonus because of the length of our readings I am going to be a little shorter than usual.

The story is pretty straightforward. Jesus comes into Jerusalem riding on a colt and “people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’” We do not know how many people were involved in the events of Palm Sunday. The population of Jerusalem at the time was around 75,000 but the number could swell to around 180,000 during major festivals. So, we can safely assume that it was a pretty decent sized crowd. I mean it’s not like Jesus was riding into Lannon. Now, thanks to the lectionary we know where this ends but as I said I want to take a minute and enjoy today. Let’s celebrate one of those rare moments where broken humanity actually got things right. I mean it doesn’t happen very often so we should probably get excited when it does. And if being happy is not your thing, come back later in the week where I promise there will be plenty to feel rotten about.

So back to the goodness of today and why I say humanity got things right. Today is one of the few times in Jesus’ earthly ministry where there is nothing transactional in the way the crowds interact with him. In the triumphal entry no one is asking Jesus for a miracle or wanting a free lunch or even asking for advice. They love Jesus because of who he is, not because of what he can do for them. People are simple excited that the Messiah is actually there. For this brief moment Jesus’ presence was all they needed. And in many ways, this is the greatest type of relationship we can have, where the presence of the other is enough.

Certainly, there are transactions that happen with any relationship. We like it when people get us a birthday present or pick us up at the airport, but it should not end there. If you have ever had a friend who was always asking you for something and never giving anything in return you probably concluded that they were just using you. There was no relationship deeper than what they would have with a vending machine. But there comes a time in all great friendships and great marriages where the presence of the other is enough. And that is what is demonstrated today with the triumphal entry. No one is running up to Jesus with an agenda, they are simply excited that he is there. If you remember back a few months to Christmas you may recall the part of Matthew’s Gospel where we read, “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God with us’).” Today reminds us that God being with us is a gift in and of itself.

Much of the debates about the existence of God or the reasons why people doubt their faith often center on the question of what God can or should do for us. That is God’s existence, or His goodness is often dependent on things we see in the world. If something bad happens this can be taken as a sign that God does not exist because if God really existed, He would have prevented such a thing. We become blinded to seeing God because we are too distracted by the cares and occupations of this life. And if we spend time focused only on things in the world that are going wrong, we miss Immanuel. We miss the fact that God is here with us. We miss that God is not out there somewhere and uncaring but is here and wants to be with us in all things.

We have the rest of the week to see what happens when people forget to rejoice in the fact that God became flesh and dwelt among us. For today let’s just be happy about the joy and excitement that comes from being in the presence of the Son of God. Let’s take today as a reminder that we are at our best when we are closest to God. For as Jesus says in in Matthew’s Gospel, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The invitation is not for us to request something of Jesus but is rather to simply to come to him and be with him. The world has plenty of problems. There are a whole host of things that can cause anxiety and fear and so today is a good time to come into the presence of Christ and receive that joy and that peace which passeth understanding so that we may be God’s own this day and forevermore.