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Sermon 10 April 2022

Title: Give it up for Lent: Lifted Up

- Good morning church family—we are so glad to be with you this morning—whether you're joining us at our LargsNaz brunch in person or you're watching online from so many places all over the world, we hope that you are blessed by what you see and hear today, and that you feel the presence of the Holy Spirit with you right where you are. It is a good day to gather together for worship.
- Now today is a special day, particularly for folks who, like Pastor Tasha and myself, are from the Augusta GA area, because it's Master's Sunday—the end of Master's week—so I've got my Green Jacket on—I know it's not just like the one they give the winner, but it's all I've got--and all week long the Master's golf tournament has been going on at the Augusta National golf club, and if you're at our brunch I hope you're enjoying our Master's-themed menu—those pimento cheese and egg salad—or egg mayo—sandwiches are just like the ones you'd get if you were there among the crowds in Augusta watching the competitors struggle through the Amen Corner—that's the 11th and 12th holes, and they're they toughest holes in what is a difficult course in general—I read one headline that said that on Friday, the Amen corner was a survival test, and not everyone survived—because the conditions, like the wind, were so tough that it was the end of the line for some. But some survived, and all

eyes will be on them at the end of the day today, Master's Sunday--to see who will rise from the ranks to be crowned champion—might it be Tiger Woods, who surprised everybody by simply showing up after what they're calling a career-ending car crash last February—might he somehow miraculously resurrect his past glory—or will last year's champion remain—or might they be elevating some relative unknown to the upper echelon of the greats of the game. I have to confess that I had never heard of Scottie Scheffler until this week, and I imagine some of you have never heard of him either. But we will have to wait and see.

- But of course I am aware, and I am sure that you are too, that today is not only Master's Sunday, but today is also Palm Sunday
- ---that's the day when we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, when he was greeted by adoring crowds who lifted up palm branches and waved them, who laid down their cloaks like a red carpet and shouted "Hosanna"—"Save us! Blessed is the name of the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel."
- Today also marks the beginning of Holy Week-- the week when we remember the days leading up to the crucifixion and burial of Jesus on Friday, we call to mind the dark day of waiting on Holy Saturday, the anxiety and the confusion that Jesus' followers felt—the grief and the sorrow and the disappointment—but the story doesn't end there—next Sunday we celebrate the glorious surprise that the disciples found on Easter morning when they discovered that the tomb was empty—Jesus was not there—he had risen—he had risen indeed!
- But we are not there yet. For these past several Sundays in Lent we have been walking through a sermon series called "Give it up for Lent" and on the first Sunday

we took a look at Lent in general, and the way that folks often “give something up” as a way of exercising spiritual discipline—and we suggested that it might be a useful thing to appreciate the Lenten season—to “give it up” for Lent and to allow this time to be a time of deepening our faith and strengthening our walk with God.

- Then we looked at Luke 4, Jesus’ 40 days of temptation in the wilderness in a sermon called “time’s up”—and we saw how Satan makes use of opportune times of testing and temptation—but we also were reminded of the way that just as the 40 days in the wilderness came to an end, and Lent will come to an end, so also for each one of us, one day our time’s gonna be up as well.
- Pastor Tasha brought a message called “get up” in which she told us about the way that Jesus was interrupted on the way to the house of a religious leader whose daughter was near death—and we learned about three extraordinary individuals—Legion, and Jairus and Veronica, who had radically life-changing encounters with Jesus
- The next week we heard about how Jesus was travelling toward Jerusalem and was warned to stay away, but responds by telling the Pharisees that there was a fox in their henhouse—that sermon was called “gathered up” because we learned about the way that Jesus said he wanted to gather up his children in Jerusalem like a mother hen gathers her chicks but they were unwilling—but we also learned about the way that God’s children were gathered up—in Jerusalem—on the Day of Pentecost
- and then finally last week we looked at the 12th chapter of John’s gospel and saw how Lazarus, Martha and Mary lived-out their faith—by sitting at the table, by serving and by sacrificing—but we also saw that Judas criticised what he saw, and

failed to understand the transformative power of God to renew and refresh and revive that which is emptied out, poured out—and so that sermon was called “used up.”

- And today our scripture also comes from the 12th chapter of John’s gospel, just a little further down, starting with verse 12—now in between last week’s scripture and this week’s scripture John has told us in verses 9-11 that a great crowd learned that Jesus was at Lazarus’ house and came out, not only because of Jesus but to see Lazarus—someone who had been dead but now lived—and John tells us that because a lot of Jews are deserting them and believing in Jesus, the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death too, because he was the reason people believed
- And after that little aside, John tells us that that same great crowd heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, and they went out to meet him.
- And when they do, they lift up palm branches and lay down their cloaks and lift up their voices and lift up the name of Jesus—and that of course, is why today is Palm Sunday.
- But today is not JUST Palm Sunday—today is also Passion Sunday--a day when we recall the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus—when he is lifted up on the cross—the humiliation, the torture of a gruesome public execution by the powers-that-be—a day when we try, as we will for the next 6 days, to understand the depth of what it means that Jesus did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself NOTHING—EVEN to death on a cross.
- And so we refer to this day as Palm/Passion Sunday. And that slash between the two terms is a good reminder that the events of Palm Sunday are best viewed through the lens of the Passion—that the triumphal entry and the shouts of the crowd

cannot be understood fully until after the crucifixion and resurrection. John's gospel tell us that this was the case for Jesus' disciples in Chapter 12 verse 16, where John writes, (Jesus') 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." That is, Jesus' glorification—now, "glorification" refers to Jesus's being "lifted up" on the cross, and then from the grave and into heaven—and once His disciples had seen how Jesus was glorified, how he was "lifted up"—they "remembered" the events that had happened that first Palm Sunday, but also all of Jesus' life—the things he had done and the things he had said—and then they understood them.

- We, too, have the advantage of looking at the events described in John's gospel, chapter 12 verses 12 through 19, in retrospect—with the benefit of knowing what was yet to come—and, like Jesus' disciples, knowing how Jesus was glorified, we can better understand these verses because we too can "remember" what has been written about Jesus and what has been done to him, too.
- And the way I want us to approach all this is by using the simple phrase that is the title of today's sermon—"lifted up." "Lifted up." And for just a little while we are going to consider how Jesus was and is "lifted up."
- And the first way that Jesus is lifted up has to do with the fact that today is Palm Sunday—and Palm Sunday is the day when we remember the way that Jesus is lifted up by the great crowd in Jerusalem—the way he is honored and welcomed and praised.

- Now we just mentioned that after the resurrection, the disciples remembered what had happened on that first Palm Sunday and it made sense to them—and we have that same perspective—
- But this crowd of people who have come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, who have seen and heard about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead and all the other miraculous works that Jesus has done—this crowd doesn't know about the Last Supper or the crucifixion and resurrection—but they do know that Jesus has done powerful things, and said powerful things—that he was wanted by the authorities—authorities who, when they saw the way the crowd shouted and greeted Jesus, and heard the testimonies of those who had seen Lazarus raised from the dead, said to each other “we can do nothing—the world has gone after Him!”
- And this is the way it might have looked at the moment when those crowds went out to meet Jesus as he entered the city—these people who waved their palm branches and shouted “save us!”—and I want to consider for a little bit just what's going through the minds of the people who are waving those palms and shouting—as they lift Jesus up.
- John gives us a very clear picture of just that in verse 34 of Chapter 12--there the people in the crowd tell Jesus that they have read in the Law that the Messiah, the Christos, the Christ, will remain forever—and they're pretty sure that Jesus is that Messiah—that Christ—after all, who else could do the things he'd done—he can raise the dead, after all--but when he starts talking about being the Son of Man and being “lifted up”—being killed—then things don't make sense. They think “the Messiah can't perish.” But let's hold off on that idea for a moment.

- Let's think about what these crowds are thinking when they welcome Jesus to Jerusalem with shouts of "Save us!" and declare him the King of Israel.
- What had been expected of the Messiah was a King who would fulfil the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7, and also the covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai described in Exodus—and while Jesus does both of those things—the way he does them is not the way that has been expected—because
- The people in this crowd are expecting their victorious deliverer, a prophet like Moses or a King like David who will not only free them from their bondage to the pagan powers of Rome's occupying forces, but also from the oppression of the Scribes and the Pharisees— their religious authorities who are in cahoots with Rome, and who do not help but hinder the people's efforts to live according to the Law and to find relationship with God—but now, at long last, now comes the Liberator who will bring about the defeat of their foes and lead them to their rightful place among the nations of the world—now comes one who would make Israel great again—and so this crowd is "lifting Jesus up"—putting him on a pedestal, honoring and praising him as they waved their palm branches and shouted "Hosanna" "Save us" Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the **King** of Israel!"
- But it's in the very next verse that John gives us a hint about what's coming—where he suggests that maybe this crowd isn't going to be entirely satisfied with what Jesus has to offer. Verse 14 reads:
- Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: 15 "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"
- Jesus is not riding a war horse—Jesus's triumphal entry is not a show of power and destructive force that demands obedience and respect at the risk of retribution—no,

Jesus has **chosen** a donkey—the symbol of peace and ceremony, of humility and lowliness—the very animal that would become the basis of pagan derision and ridicule in the years that would follow—remember the way that the pagans would refer to the early Christians as donkey worshippers?

- Here is another thing that John tells us that the disciples didn't understand at the time, but in retrospect—after Jesus was glorified—they made the connection with the prophecy of Zechariah, and in Zechariah 9:9 it is indeed written: Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- After Jesus was glorified, the disciples had the benefit of the proper perspective—and we too, knowing what is yet to come in this narrative can look back at the wealth of things that have been written and we can be aware of the things that had been done to Jesus and all the things that Jesus did as well.
- But the expectations of the crowd prevented the people from possessing the proper perspective. They wanted a conquering King but they got the Prince of Peace.
- In fact, as Bible scholar Sherri Brown points out, “if this is the story of a traditional messiah-king, it is the most stunning political failure in the history of the world. Something else must be going on.”
- And something else is going on. Jesus has come to bring salvation, to rescue the oppressed, to reign and rule over His Kingdom, but not in the way that the crowds expect.
- John concludes his description of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem by reminding us in verses 17-19 of the effect that seeing Lazarus raised from the dead

had on this crowd. He tells us that people kept talking about it—they “continued to testify”—and John tells us that Lazarus was the reason the crowd went out to meet Jesus with palm branches and shouts of “Hosanna!”—and this is why the authorities wanted Lazarus dead—because a living Lazarus was a testimony to the power of Jesus

- And even though the Pharisees say to each other that they are powerless to stop folks following after Jesus in verse 19, the truth is that the folks who had seen Lazarus raised from the dead couldn’t have fully understood what they were seeing because like the disciples in verse 16, it would not be until after Jesus was glorified that the full meaning of Lazarus’ resurrection could be understood. While it was certainly an undeniable and convincing demonstration of the power of Jesus, and it bolstered the idea that they already had that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the conquering King who was going to seize control and establish Israel as a political power—that was a misinterpretation of the fullness of what was happening.
- The truth was that something bigger than just a political overthrow was going on here—this was not just a local incident, not just some earthly historical event, there was something happening here that was bigger than that-- what was happening in and around the man Jesus of Nazareth was something that had cosmic implications—that’s why John begins his gospel by telling us that Jesus, the Word, was in the beginning with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us—the Word took on humanity and moved in to the neighbourhood—
- But the Word made flesh, the Jesus who took on humanity and moved into the neighbourhood doesn’t meet the expectations of the crowd who shouts “Hosanna”

and waves palm branches. It doesn't take long before they're dissatisfied with this Jesus, this Son of Man, because their idea of what the Messiah, the Christ, the Lord and Ruler, the King of Israel is supposed to be doesn't include suffering and death—doesn't include the Passion—remember that today is also Passion Sunday—and the second way that Jesus is lifted up is this—Jesus was lifted up on the cross—

- But that presents a problem, because these crowds want to welcome a conquering King but Jesus talks about the Son of Man being “lifted up” on the cross—about suffering and servanthood and sacrifice—and that was a paradox --and so by the end of the week, as John describes in Chapter 19, shouts of “Hosanna, save us!” have replaced by shouts of “Away with him, away with him--Crucify him!” and the chief priests declare “we have no King but Caesar” --and shouting “we have no King but Caesar” is the opposite of shouting Hosanna—Save us, because shouting “save us” is acknowledging that the one to whom that is shouted is the saviour—the one who can save you, and it's acknowledging that you need saving—but “we have no King but the Emperor” is saying that Caesar is Lord and Saviour, that you don't need saving, that you don't need a saviour because you've already got one
- Now remember, though, that there are those in the crowd, even some of the religious elite, who believe in Jesus, but about whom John tells us in verse 42 that “because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.”
- **When the serpentine arm of the authorities exercised its persuasive power**, even those who believed chose something else, human glory, because they didn't think that God's glory was sufficient.

- And that's really what's happening in the 12th chapter of John's gospel, isn't it?
- When the crowds at the Passover festival really get a good look at Jesus, when they hear him talk about the Passion—the suffering and sacrifice—about becoming servants—the crowd says “Wait a minute—we thought you were our Saviour, the Christ, the Messiah, our conquering King, our Liberator”—but you're nothing but a poor peasant, a profane prisoner, about to be put to death by the principalities and powers. “Crucify him!” —and one who hangs on a tree is cursed—that's the opposite of being the Messiah in their eyes—that's nothing—that's less than nothing
- The Messiah, the Son of Man, Jesus, the one who didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped --who is lifted up, glorified, who is emptied out on the cross and calls his disciples to follow his example—the one who is lifted up by the crowds and then lifted up on a cross, is the one who is also lifted up by God Almighty, exalted and given a name above every other name—and that's our third point—**Jesus is lifted up by God the Father**
- The Apostle Paul talks about this idea in the second chapter of his epistle to the church at Phillippi, and if you joined us for our sermon series on Philippians back in April and May of last year, then you may recall that some of these verses, namely verses 5 through 11 are often called the “kenosis hymn.”
- You may also recall that “Kenosis” is a Greek word meaning “emptying”—and these verses are called the kenosis hymn because that's what they're about—God's emptying out into humanity—you see that referred to specifically in verse 7—Jesus was in the form of God but didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, something to be exploited, but EMPTIED HIMSELF OUT, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness—the verb there is *ekenosen*, to empty, and it's related

to the adjective *kenos*, which describes that which IS empty—and so what Paul is describing there is the “kenotic” movement of the incarnation—from the glory of heaven, from the Godhead into humanity—and not just simply into human form--the Son does not leave the glory of heaven and enter humanity as a king or a priest in a palace or a temple—no, the Son enters humanity in the form of a slave, and is not just “emptied out,” but emptied out in humility and obedience, even to death, even to death on a cross. That’s what Jesus is talking about in chapter 12 of John’s gospel when he talks about being “lifted up,” and when he says that when he is lifted up he will draw all the world to him.

- But in verse 9 of the kenosis hymn we find a “therefore”—so let’s find out what it’s there for—therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him a name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. God the Father lifts Jesus up.
- But Paul doesn’t just refer to the kenosis hymn—which was probably a familiar hymn to the church at Philippi—simply to illustrate the way incarnation works—to describe the way that Christ Jesus left the glory of heaven and, as Charles Wesley so eloquently put it—emptied himself of all but love and bled for Adam’s helpless race—and was therefore exalted by God above every name--no, Paul is not just describing the incarnation and the crucifixion and resurrection, no he’s doing more than that—Paul is telling us to be like this—to have the same mind that Jesus has—that same mind that does not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, that same mind as the one who emptied himself, humbled himself, and became obedient even unto death on a cross

- And so our final thought is this: we lift Jesus up—the body of Christ, followers of Jesus like you and me, we lift Jesus up when we have the same mind as Jesus—when we take up our cross and follow the one who was lifted up—the one who IS lifted up
- We lift Jesus up in our praise—we lifted up the name of Jesus in our worship this morning—we lift Jesus up in our daily lives, when we say “not my will but yours, Lord,” put me to use, put me to service, empty me out for the sake of the gospel
- We lift Jesus up even when in our times of suffering we are reminded of the one who shares our sufferings and lifts us up—and we all need to be lifted up every now and then, to be reminded that we have hope--and it is the power of the cross and the resurrection that we will celebrate next Sunday—that gives us that hope
- As we progress through Holy Week over these next few days let’s remember those 2000 years ago who would struggle to understand what God was doing, not just those in the crowd, but Jesus’ disciples too, who had no way of knowing what to expect from this Jesus who had lived and died among them, whose works they had seen and whose words they had heard. Meditate on what they must have felt when Jesus was like a grain of wheat that was planted in the ground and died. Think of the confusion and loneliness and grief they must have experienced when he was lifted up on the cross—and the joy that was to come when he was lifted up on that glorious Easter Sunday—and let’s lift Jesus up in our own lives this week.