

OUR FATHER'S WORLD

by Judy Gattis Smith



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Our Father's World

A children's monologue program
for Palm Sunday or Holy Week

by
Judy Gattis Smith

CAST OF CHARACTERS

In Order of Appearance

Narrator

Nature Characters:

Spider

Mother Hen

Rock

Raven

Thorn Bush

Camel

Lump of Clay

Olive Tree

Anemone

INTRODUCTION

Many of our churches hold a Palm Sunday procession where children enter the sanctuary during the opening hymn, waving palm branches. In some churches palms are given out to all who enter the church, and all are encouraged to wave their branches.

But Palm Sunday is more than a parade and a celebration. It is the beginning of Holy Week. A swift change occurs between Sunday with the palms and Monday, when Jesus drove the money changers from the temple. This is often a difficult transition to make.

This play attempts to bridge that gap. By using the device of nature objects to look at the storm brewing about Jesus, we can perhaps see both the celebratory aspects of the occasion and the dangers that were present even in the midst of the excited shouting.

In addition to reminding the congregation about the events of Palm Sunday, it is also hoped that this play will deepen awareness of our natural environment, prompting the audience to consider how all living things give both meaning and beauty to life.

PRODUCTION NOTES

There are a variety of ways to use this play. Most traditional would be to present it as a Palm Sunday chancel drama in the sanctuary. Immediately following an opening hymn with a traditional Palm Sunday parade, actors representing nature objects would come to the pulpit in sequence, speaking their parts. No costumes would be necessary. Dark robes for each would be appropriate.

A second possible setting would be for the actors to be seated informally throughout the sanctuary or along the church aisle, standing to speak their part at the appropriate time.

Still another possibility would be to present the drama outdoors with appropriate costumes for each character and a reenactment of the Palm Sunday procession. This could be done on a Palm Sunday afternoon. If done outdoors, actors portraying the nature objects could add creative movements to their readings. The movements should be included as a way to communicate the message of their particular object, not as a

performance. Just a slow swaying of the Olive Tree, an upward swaying of the Raven, and an opening-up movement of the Anemone could create a counterpoint to the solid motionlessness of the Rock and the Lump of Clay. Actors portraying the Camel, Mother Hen, and Spider could study the movements of these animals and decide if a simple mime of their walk would add to or detract from their reading. Someone with sacred movement experience who could illustrate these walks with small, subtle motions would be most helpful here. Do not play these animals for comedy.

Above all, fit this play to the particular needs and interests of your congregation, and do not hesitate to be creative!

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(Following an opening hymn and the procession of palm bearers, the NARRATOR speaks.)

NARRATOR: The natural world is an important backdrop in the life of Jesus — a close and crucial part of the story of which we are often unaware. Looking closely at stories about Jesus' life, we see how he cared for life in all its forms: plants, animals, even the elements. He saw beauty and truth in the most common things and often used examples of them in his teaching, from lilies in the field to the rocky ground where a solid house could be built.

Suspend your logical mind for just a moment now and imagine the environment that surrounded Jesus on that first Palm Sunday. Seeing this event through objects from nature can intensify our own inner feelings. Coexisting on that day were support and treachery, fervor and serenity, memories and forecasts, hope and disappointment, deep love and joy. As these nature characters speak, let them serve as metaphors for our own thoughts and attitudes. Be still now and listen. (*NARRATOR exits and returns to seat as SPIDER enters and crosses to the podium to speak.*)

SPIDER: Few noticed me that day, a small spider. I had built my web among the bushes by the roadside. There in my untidy scaffolding I lurked, waiting for victims to get trapped on my sticky threads. I am so small and well camouflaged that I can watch others without being noticed myself. I saw him ride by on a donkey that day. Though the crowd cheered for him, I sensed trouble. Just what that was I did not know, but I longed to cry out and warn him.

(*Stage whisper*) "Watch out!" I wanted to whisper.

You see, I have many enemies, too. Birds and shrews go after me often, and larger spiders and hunting wasps, too. I have come to recognize that look and get

1 on the defensive. But he wasn't.

2 I saw his enemies here. Most people were shouting
3 "Hosanna," but a few were only watching with that look
4 in their eyes that said, "Just wait. I am after you."

5 "Build some means of defense," I wanted to cry.

6 He looked so vulnerable. (*To imaginary Jesus*) "Don't
7 you know about pursuing prey? Don't you know how
8 the enemy creeps up on a possible victim and then
9 pounces and grabs it? Don't you know how they lie in
10 wait in their lairs until just the right moment, and then
11 move in for the kill? Don't you know? Don't you care?"

12 "I know how camouflage and stillness allows the
13 enemy to trap victims unaware. I use this method
14 myself. We create snares and wait until the prey
15 becomes entangled. I see this happening to you. Don't
16 you?"

17 "I know what it is like to be despised, to frighten
18 others even when you aren't dangerous. Wake up, Man.
19 Look around you. You are surrounded by enemies.
20 Their fangs and jaws are ready to inject poison.

21 "Why do you seem so unafraid?" (*SPIDER exits and*
22 *returns to seat as MOTHER HEN enters and crosses to the*
23 *podium to speak.*)

24 MOTHER HEN: I'm a mother hen. When I felt the earth
25 throb with the impact of many feet approaching, I
26 quickly looked around for my chicks. They had
27 scattered as usual. I knew they would panic at the
28 increasing noise. Some would rush forward only to be
29 trampled under uncaring feet. Others would scatter far
30 away from the commotion and become easy prey for
31 hungry hawks or foxes. I clucked and called. Luckily
32 they all heard my voice and came running on their
33 weak little legs to hide under my outstretched wings. As
34 they nestled against my soft body, some peeked out to
35 see what was going on. I could feel other little ones

1 trembling with fright. I fluffed out my feathers as wide
2 as I could and hunched protectively over them.

3 The sound came nearer and nearer. There were many
4 men, women, and children, all shouting and waving
5 palm branches. No one bothered me or my chicks. I
6 scowled at them, with my feathers ruffled menacingly
7 and my eyes hooded. No one wanted to challenge a
8 mother hen protecting her little ones.

9 Then I saw the man on the donkey at the center of the
10 rowdy procession. He seemed to relate to my reality.
11 For one brief moment, he looked at me. He understood
12 what I was doing. I saw the love for every small, living
13 creature on his face. Then the glowing expression
14 vanished, and I saw a single tear run down his cheek
15 and heard him sadly say, “O Jerusalem ... How often I
16 have longed to gather your children together, as a hen
17 gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not
18 willing!” (Luke 13:34). (*MOTHER HEN exits and returns to*
19 *seat as ROCK enters and crosses to the podium to speak.*)

20 **ROCK:** I am a Rock. Ouch! Something just kicked me, jostled
21 me. Hooves unearthed me from my comfortable home,
22 and I went skidding over to the side of the road.

23 How many eons have I been nestled in the comforting
24 earth here, emitting slow waves of energy, watching
25 with amazement at how worried, how frightened, how
26 anxious these humans seem to be? Their worries and
27 concerns are just a blip in time, soon to be forgotten.
28 The worries that furrow their brows are so
29 unimportant, so soon erased by coming generations.

30 I’ve seen generals being heralded in parades such as
31 this. Where are they now? Ah, the mockery of ambition.
32 They thought they were on the path to glory, but even
33 in the moment of their triumph, they were grumbling
34 “not enough.”

35 I’ve seen worried, barefoot peasants plodding by,

1 burdened and tired from unending labor. The same fate
2 awaits them.

3 Once, a man humiliated by a family scandal came to
4 this path in the dead of night and wept bitterly,
5 weighed down with groaning and weeping. Now, who
6 cares? The unhappiness that seems to have shattered
7 his life is long past, and who has any concern for it, or
8 even interest in it now?

9 Why was I dislodged after so long a period of time? Is
10 this parade somehow different? There is something on
11 the face of the man on the donkey that seems to see
12 beyond the petty concerns of humans. Yes, there is a
13 deep sadness here, but such sadness seems out of place
14 in a parade where crowds are cheering, waving
15 branches to a victor, and shouting hosannas.

16 He alone seems to understand the temporal nature of
17 this moment. He seems to be very present in the here
18 and now, yet experiencing it in the light of eternity. For
19 some reason, I think this man will not pass into oblivion
20 like most of the others. Plus, he seems to have what
21 generations of people have been looking for — all the
22 worried ones, the burdened ones, the arrogant and
23 haughty ones, those who move through life in a fog or a
24 frenzy.

25 I am mute, of course, but I want to cry out. For the
26 first time I want to shout, “Yes! Yes!” I want to join with
27 the cheering crowds. This is how life should be lived. I
28 see it. After all these years, after all these passing
29 parades, here is Someone who understands what life is
30 all about and how it is meant to be lived. Hosanna!
31 (*ROCK exits and returns to seat as RAVEN enters and crosses*
32 *to the podium to speak.*)

33 RAVEN: I am a raven circling the city of Jerusalem while a
34 parade passes below me. As I glide lower, I see a man on
35 a donkey leading the parade. I have seen this man

1 before. I was there, floating lazily on the updrafts of the
 2 wind, when this man went into the desert to ponder
 3 God's will for his life. When he looked up and saw me,
 4 he must have remembered how ravens fed Elijah when
 5 he was also in a wilderness — but I carried no bread
 6 this time. Jesus, as I know he is called, faced his
 7 temptations alone. His every ounce of energy was
 8 consumed with his quest. His gnawing hunger was not
 9 eased by me. Was it then, Jesus, when you saw clearly
 10 just where you were headed?

11 I am familiar with the wildernesses. My raspy calls
 12 are often heard among its trees. It's home territory for
 13 me.

14 So I circled and called. For many, my low-pitched call
 15 symbolizes loneliness and despair. I think I was a
 16 perfect companion for Jesus there in the desert. My
 17 black covering suggests darkness. Certainly loneliness
 18 and darkness lie ahead for this man. Maybe by looking
 19 at me there, he could see his future.

20 Many people consider me a symbol of evil. If those
 21 persons watching the parade looked up and saw me,
 22 they might consider me an omen of what lies ahead for
 23 this man.

24 But I, maybe more than anyone here, sense the
 25 strength in Jesus to face whatever lies ahead.

26 Just as I circled him in the wilderness, I will be there,
 27 circling, when he dies on a cross, and I'll give my wild
 28 calls again, reminding others of their personal
 29 wilderness and saying, "See? Here is one man who
 30 wrestled with temptation and won." (*RAVEN exits and*
 31 *returns to seat as THORN BUSH enters and crosses to the*
 32 *podium to speak.*)

33 THORN BUSH: I am just a lowly thorn bush. I've been
 34 planted beside this road for many years, watching
 35 pilgrims trudge past to Jerusalem.

1 I am squatty, dust-covered, ugly. Most people avoid
 2 me because of my prickly spikes. I have reached out and
 3 grabbed donkey hair and sheep wool when those stupid
 4 animals came too close. These sticky thorns protect me.
 5 I would be devoured without them. Camels and goats
 6 eat anything. They come sniffing and licking. My
 7 hardness and razor-sharp points discourage them.

8 The wild pattern of my branches breaks up the winds
 9 that would flatten me. Lacking beauty, I survive as best
 10 I can.

11 I'm rewarded by shouts of pain when humans catch
 12 hold of me. Some have learned from me and use my
 13 branches to torture and beat others. I bite into human
 14 skin easily, mercilessly. Their thin skin is all too easy
 15 for me to penetrate.

16 Today a parade went by. A man, with a different look
 17 somehow, rode by on a donkey. Men, women, and
 18 children crowded around, cheering. Of course they all
 19 avoided me, and I got a good glimpse of it all. There was
 20 something different in the face of that man that I have
 21 never seen in another face.

22 Then a weaselly looking man, dressed elegantly in a
 23 silk robe, paused beside me. He stood here long after
 24 the parade had passed by. Taking his knife from his
 25 sash, he slashed off one of my branches, twisting it,
 26 bending it, fashioning it into a circle. He kept mumbling
 27 to himself: "You see, you see? He is too dangerous.
 28 Look — the whole world seems to be following him."
 29 *(THORN BUSH exits and returns to seat as CAMEL enters and*
 30 *crosses to the podium to speak.)*

31 CAMEL: I am a camel. I was pushed aside, jostled onto a side
 32 path so a parade could pass by. My driver could not see
 33 what was going on since there was a crowd of people
 34 cheering on the parade. He prodded me to make way
 35 through the crowd, but it was no use. He cursed and

1 kicked at me. He wants to get through that city gate and
2 unload his wares for the coming celebration. He needs
3 to get into the city before dark to unload the packs I
4 carry, locate the booth of the vendor who would sell
5 these wares, and receive his generous reward. This
6 parade is using up his precious time. If it gets late, his
7 contact may close up his booth, and my driver would
8 have to spend the night guarding his produce.

9 But I'm grateful for the chance to lie down and rest.
10 I can raise my long neck to see what's going on.

11 A man riding a donkey is leading the parade. Why is
12 he on a lowly, prodding donkey instead of me? If he had
13 climbed onto my back, he would have been high above
14 the cheering crowds, above the waving branches. I
15 would have proceeded with the dignity worthy of a
16 king.

17 Watching the parade, I was reminded that once I did
18 carry a king, many years ago. That was a long, hard
19 journey over many miles, but I had a saddle that was
20 soft on my back, and the king who rode on me wore
21 velvets and silks and other soft fabrics. There was
22 magic on that journey. A bright light from a star made
23 it possible to travel in the cool of evening. The air
24 seemed perfumed, and the wafting breeze felt gentle —
25 so unlike the smoky haze that obscures everything here
26 from the burning of sacrifices inside the city gate.

27 I remember the final destination, a stable where my
28 king dismounted. There, I was fed and given water and
29 treated gently and lovingly. There, the star shone even
30 brighter, and heavenly music filled the sky. A beautiful,
31 gracious lady smiled at me, and a newborn baby
32 reached out a hand in my direction. I remember feeling
33 a sense of peace and fulfillment, such as I have never
34 felt before. Ah, but that was so long ago.

35 Now I belong to this harsh owner who overloads me

1 with merchandise — drives me mercilessly, beats me
 2 and abuses me. Still, he cannot remove that memory
 3 from my mind — that time in my life when I carried a
 4 king and visited a special birth. I wonder whatever
 5 happened to that beautiful child.

6 My owner strikes me now and urges me to move on —
 7 to push through and over the crowd — but I turn my
 8 head from side to side and sniff. Something in the air
 9 reminds me of that special aroma and aura that I knew
 10 so long ago. (*CAMEL exits and returns to seat as LUMP OF*
 11 *CLAY enters and crosses to the podium to speak.*)

12 **LUMP OF CLAY:** Hosanna! Hosanna!

13 What? You don't think I should be shouting? You
 14 don't think I can appreciate who this man is? You don't
 15 think I am aware of the generating force of love this
 16 man radiates? All because I am a lump of clay — one
 17 lump among many along this roadway.

18 How many of these running, shouting persons are
 19 aware of the power of the living earth beneath their
 20 feet? Jesus knows. He knows the healing power of
 21 earth — my healing power. Once he picked me up,
 22 moistened me, and put me on the eyes of a blind man.
 23 And then, just as I hold flowers that open, that man's
 24 eyes were opened. Yes, Jesus knows my malleable
 25 substance is full of potential for growth and
 26 transformation — and he knows you are just a little like
 27 me. The prophet Isaiah said, "O Lord, you are our
 28 father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the
 29 work of your hand" (Isaiah 64:8). Jesus knows my link
 30 with the source of life itself. I hold root and seed and
 31 flowering in my dense and dark substance. So I'll shout
 32 "hosanna" while I can — while he passes.

33 You see, I know what is going to happen soon — very
 34 soon. It is so near. I sense something deep in the
 35 earth — a shift of the foundations that is so subtle that

not one of those shouting here is aware of it. Listen carefully. There is a slow, underground rumble. An earthquake is coming! Buildings will crumble and crack. Boulders will roll aside. The whole earth will be changed. I, who represent solid ground stability, can testify to this. (*LUMP OF CLAY exits and returns to seat as OLIVE TREE enters and crosses to the podium to speak.*)

OLIVE TREE: I am an olive tree, many thousands of years old. I have stood here in this sun-drenched valley just outside the gate to Jerusalem all these years. I am older than any of those persons waving branches and shouting.

A tall man broke off one of my branches to wave at the passing parade. I am so glad. All the other onlookers seem to be waving palm branches — signs of a warrior's victory and triumph. For some persons here, palms are a symbol of resistance to Rome. Waving palms suggests that Jesus is some sort of upstart, a rebel, a potential political threat.

My branches have always stood for something else. Victory, yes, but a different kind of victory. They represent a deep peace and safety. It was one of my branches that the dove brought back to Noah when the great flood waters began to recede.

I am familiar with the man they call Jesus. There's a grove of us olive trees in the garden where he often goes to pray. I shield him from the sun or simply offer him a backrest when he sits. He has tasted my glossy black fruit in the fall and now smells my fragrant spring blossoms. My leathery leaves shelter him and whisper of trials overcome — of strength to endure. I have heard his dreams of leading all human souls from exile into the true peace of being at one with God. I am glad my twisted, gnarled trunk offers him comfort.

I fear there are darker hours ahead for him. We olive

1 trees will welcome him. We will whisper to him about
2 the serenity that awaits after the struggle is over. We
3 will remind him that the Messiah will lead human souls
4 into the true peace of being with God. (*OLIVE TREE exits*
5 *and returns to seat as ANEMONE enters and crosses to the*
6 *podium to speak.*)

7 ANEMONE: We cover the ground along the parade route. We
8 are the common flowers, the anemone, our seeds
9 carried here by the wind. Thousands of us burst into
10 bloom in the spring, making a magnificent splash of
11 color and adding great joy and beauty to the arid
12 landscape. Our bright hues add to the festive
13 atmosphere here today. I am a brilliant scarlet, but
14 others are purple, pink, blue, and white. Jesus calls us
15 the “lily of the valley.”

16 Normally we turn our faces toward the sun, and our
17 blossoms open to their fullness in its warm rays. But
18 today we turn our flower faces to follow this man on the
19 donkey until he passes from sight through the city
20 gates.

21 The sun is shining now, and we rejoice. Soon the
22 parade will pass by. Dark days are ahead for this man
23 on the donkey. Just as we, with the coming of night,
24 close and fold up our petals, hiding our brilliance, so
25 darkness will engulf the land and this man. But we send
26 out our message of hope. When the sun shines on us
27 again, we will unfold in all our glory, and the world will
28 again rejoice.

29 Ah, the parade has passed. We feel the emptiness of
30 God’s passing.

31 The parade was glorious — the shouting, the
32 enthusiasm, the bright faces of children, the
33 excitement, the music. We sent our sweet fragrance
34 over it all. Ah, it was extraordinarily beautiful. But,
35 look — there a last sight of him, as he goes through the

1 city gate.

2 After the shouting dies, there is silence. People
3 slowly make their way to their homes, picking up
4 discarded garments, carrying drooping palms or
5 leaving them helter-skelter on the road.

6 Spiders hunker down in their webs
7 Mother hen releases the tight hold on her chicks
8 Stones reflect the deepening shadows
9 The thorn bush shrivels a little
10 A camel plods heavily on
11 With a last cry, a raven flies away
12 The olive tree keeps a silent vigil
13 The earth settles solemnly
14 The air is still
15 The world seems to hold its breath
16 Night approaches.

17 We, too, close our petals, entombing our colors and
18 fragrance, and prepare for night. Not until sunrise will
19 we open ourselves up to a new day once again.
20 (*ANEMONE exits and returns to seat.*)

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33 *NOTE: The numerals running vertically down the left margin of each*
34 *page of dialogue are for the convenience of the director. With*
35 *these, he/she may easily direct attention to a specific passage.*



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