

SERMON
Sunday of the Passion
Palm Sunday
Dedication of a Church Building
March 28, 2010

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

It was a day young Jacob would not soon forget. It was Passover week and Jewish people from all around were streaming into Jerusalem. He had seen great crowds before. But on this day, something was different.

You see, Jacob was drawn to the crowd by a most deafening noise. He looked down from the hillside on which he lived. He could barely see what was happening as the massive crowd moved slowly toward Jerusalem. In the center of the crowd, he could see a man riding on an animal.

Soon the enormous crowd drew so near, that Jacob could hear clearly what they were shouting. They cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Again, "Hosanna, blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord."

Young Jacob thought; "What could it all mean?" He hurried down the hillside to get a closer look. He grabbed the hand of one of the pilgrims and asked; "What's going on?"

The man replied; "What's going on? Why, the king is coming, that's what's going on. See him ride on the royal animal. In olden days, all of our kings rode the royal animal on the day of their coronation.

The promises of a Messiah are finally coming true. His name is Jesus – Jesus from Nazareth. He is the one we have been waiting for. He is our king. The king is coming, Hosanna! Help us now Jesus. Save us Jesus!"

Young Jacob still didn't understand completely. So he joined the crowd as they followed Jesus down the dusty road leading into Jerusalem. He turned to the man again and asked; "What kind of help can he bring? How can he save us?"

The man decided that he would have to sit down with Jacob and explain exactly what was happening. So they left the crowd and found a shady place under a tree.

"See the woman over there – the one with the long matted hair and ragged clothes," he said as he pointed to a passing woman in the parade. "She is a very poor woman, and people have done terrible things to her. She is crying for help – she is crying for an end to her poverty and her oppression."

"See the young men over there," said the stranger, "They want to fight in an army that will drive the Romans from the land. They are crying for help. They are saying their Hosannas to the Messiah – the king who they hope will lead them against their enemies."

"Others are crying for healing. Perhaps they have a disease and are no longer welcome in their community. Maybe they are looking to have their relationship with God restored. Perhaps they are grieving or lonely, and are desperately seeking peace and companionship. They are crying out to the Messiah for love and acceptance."

The stranger got up and left Jacob to ponder these things. Young Jacob thought; "Hosanna, Hosanna to the Messiah – King Jesus. Jesus, help me. Help my family who is always hungry and thirsty with little to eat or drink. Save me from watching my father die from the evil spirit inside him. Save my father; Hosanna, Hosanna, Messiah – King Jesus."

Jacob got up from his place under the tree and joined the crowd again as it made its way into the city. Yes indeed, thought Jacob, this shall be a day that I will never forget.

But unlike young Jacob, who wondered – who was confused, you and I know the rest of the story. We know about this king. We know just what kind of king he is.

A king who didn't come with a great army, but a king who came with great humility. For this king came not to conquer, but to serve – to give himself in the most complete way.

This king came riding into his coronation on this Palm Sunday not to be crowned with jewels – not to be robed in a cape of splendor. But he came to be crowned with a circle of thrones. Instead of being clothed in majesty, he was stripped of his clothes.

The theologians Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan together wrote a book entitled, *The Last Week*. It does a great job of describing the historic events of each day in the last week of Jesus' life. When it comes to describing the events of Palm Sunday, they talk about two processions going into Jerusalem.

The first procession was the Roman Governor who came into the city with a massive demonstration of force, as was done before every Jewish holiday to keep tabs on the celebrations, making sure that they didn't get out of hand.

Perhaps we could describe it today as “shock and awe”. It was meant to put fear into the hearts and minds of anyone who might be thinking of causing any trouble. “Hail Caesar” was the shout that was demanded.

This procession included mighty military leaders riding upon great stallions. They were followed by chariots and armed soldiers as far as the eye could see. This was the kingdom of the world.

On the opposite side of town, there was another procession. It was led by Jesus. With him was a group of ragtag peasants who were searching for hope in their lives. They had no weapons. They were not the rich or the powerful. They were women and children. They were the poor and the sick. They were the sinners and the outcasts.

They were those who suffered the most under the oppression of the Roman Empire. They followed this Jesus who proclaimed a different kind of kingdom.

So as you can see, on this day in Jerusalem, there were two kingdoms represented. And of course, with two kingdoms, there must be two kings. Therefore, the stage was set for a conflict of epic proportions. Choices had to be made. Sides had to be chosen. For there can only be one king.

Does one side with Caesar with its powerful Empire and military might? Or does one side with Jesus and his message of peace and humility?

Believe it or not, that question is still asked of us to this very day. Which side shall we choose? Of course, most of us here today would hopefully say “Jesus – Jesus is our king,” even though we really like our empire. But what does that really mean.

Today, as we continue our Lenten journey, we recall the events leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Many people know this as “Palm Sunday”, as the church remembers Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem amidst a flurry of palm branches. For many people, this Sunday will be more about palm branches than Jesus himself.

However, let’s stretch our imaginations and put the two together. The image today is the “palm.” But not in the sense of green vegetation. The palm, in this case, is part of the hand.

There is the palm of the hand that on the first Maundy Thursday washed and dried the feet of the disciples. Servant-hood is the way of life for the followers of Jesus. Look at your palms. How many hours have they spent in service to others?

Then there is the palm of the hand that breaks and distributes bread and offers the cup of wine. Discipleship means eating and drinking at the Lord's table for strength and direction. Look at your palms as they are put forward to receive the body and blood of our Lord.

There are palms pressed together in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. We know that the will of the Father is more important than the will of any one of us. "Not my will, but yours O Lord, be done". Look at your palms before you put them together in prayer.

There are the palms through which nails are driven into the cross. We recall that to follow the one who died on the cross means that we also may suffer for our faith. Look at your palms when you suffer because of your devotion to Jesus.

Today we have witnessed a parade of palms. But if this is all there is, then we are seriously missing the point. For the parade into Jerusalem is only the beginning.

Likewise, our parade into this new place of worship is only the beginning. Although it may seem like an end to a long journey, especially if you ask the building task force, it is truly only the first step of yet another leg in our journey as disciples of Jesus.

For we are called to be about the work of Jesus in our community and in the world. Certainly, it would be great if it could all end here. The beautiful space, the inspiring music, the fellowship with friends and family.

But just like Jesus probably enjoyed the entrance into Jerusalem experience, he knew that God was leading him to a greater mission. It was a mission for the sake of the world. It was a mission that would bring the message of God's kingdom. It was a message of hope, a message of joy, a message of peace, a message of forgiveness, a message of freedom, a message of love.

Indeed, the world did not accept this message. In fact, a few days later, Jesus would be put to death on a cross at the hands of the empire.

So as we pick up that cross and try to carry on the message that began with the words and actions of Jesus, don't be surprised if we too are rejected by the kingdom of the world.

For it is only then that we can receive the assurance of the life that is to come through the resurrection. But that's another story that is yet to come.

Therefore, we press forward, each day, experiencing the joys and disappointments that life brings. But we do so with the certain hope that death has been defeated once and for all, and the true victory is ours. Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting.
Amen.