

## Palm Sunday

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on March 28, 1993, Palm Sunday. Scripture Lessons: Matthew 21:1-11; ~~Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29~~; Isaiah 50:4-9a; ~~Psalm 31:9-16 (Passion narrative)~~; Philippians 2:5-11; ~~The Passion narrative (Matthew 27:11-54)~~.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

This morning, in Jerusalem, Rome, London, Hong Kong; in Entebbe, Uganda and even in parts of war torn Somalia and Yugoslavia, Christian congregations are singing:

All glory, laud and honour  
To thee, Redeemer, King,  
To whom the lips of children  
Made sweet hosannas ring.

Christians have been singing those words for over a thousand years, since St. Theodulph of Orleans wrote them from a prison cell in Southern France.

But Christians have been singing hosannas to Christ long before that. In AD 110 the governor of the ancient province of Bithynia, in Asia Minor, wrote to the Roman Emperor Trajan, about the appearance in his province of a new unauthorized religious cult. "How should I deal with the members of this religious cult?" he asked the emperor. "They assemble on a fixed day before daylight to sing a hymn to one named Christ as a God." He was describing how Christians, living eighty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, worshiped. They sang! Singing has always been the mark of authentic Christian faith. Singing has been a central element in our celebration of Palm Sunday since the pilgrims on that first Palm Sunday sang to the Lord, "Hosanna to the Son of David."

But why sing to Christ? We sing because of who Jesus is. ~~Who is he?~~ The pilgrims on that first Palm Sunday called him the Son of David. Everybody in those days knew that was a title of the Messiah, the King of Israel long foretold by prophets. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking,

"Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

People living a few years later in the city of Philippi were also asking, "Who is this Jesus?" The apostle Paul answered by quoting what many New Testament scholars believe to be an early Christian hymn sung. Paul writes that Jesus Christ is the Lord to whom, one day, every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. That means that Jesus is none other than the God whom the ancient Hebrews called Lord, Adonai, or Jehovah.

People are still asking today, "Who is this Jesus?". I've pondered that question since the time I was a little boy. The answer that I've been compelled to give is that Jesus is God in the flesh. I believe what Paul said is true, that Jesus...

*...though he was in the form of God... emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.*

I can't speak of God without speaking of Jesus. And I must tell you, quite frankly, that apart from Jesus, I find God to be a terror. <sup>in who became a fool just to save,</sup> But in Jesus I trust God as a friend.

I hear the echoes of his voice speaking in the ancient prophecy of Isaiah which we read this morning from the Old Testament:

*I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard. I hid not my face from insult and spitting.*

In Jesus, God humbled God's self to the point of allowing human beings to strike him, humiliate, insult, and spit upon him. God, in Christ, journeyed to the far country to reach us in our lost situation and bring us home. The Gospel is the proclamation of a self-giving God, a caring God, who identifies with our predicament in order to transform it (McGrath).

This is the God in whom I trust. This is the God I worship and to whom I sing. I don't sing simply because Jesus was a good man. Nor do I sing because he was the world's greatest teacher. I sing because Jesus is Lord; because in him God became a suffering God who stands by us in our suffering and pain. The God I trust in Christ is a God who suffers humiliation, pain and death in order to save this world he loves and make it new.

In a few moments I'll be asking ~~12~~ men and women to respond the question, "Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior?" "Do you intend to be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his word, and showing his love, to your life's end?" Would all of you who are present this morning carefully consider those questions yourselves. If you've already answered, "I do!" to those vows, why not renew that relationship with Christ this morning? And if there's anyone here this morning has never said, "I do!" to those questions won't you carefully consider answering in the silence of your hearts', "I do... I, now, turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as my Lord and Savior." And if, perchance, there's somebody present who simply isn't sure how to answer that question, "Who is this Jesus?" I would love to sit down with you sometime soon and listen to what you think and share with you why I confess that Christ is Lord.

Let us pray: Almighty and ever living God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon himself our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us an example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.