

March 16, 2008

Palm Sunday

Title: Let us shout Hosanna!

Text: The Lord's Servant: Isaiah 42:1-7  
"Who is he?" the people asked: Matthew 21:8-11  
The Arrest of Jesus: Matthew 26:47-50

Prayer: Dear Holy One, we stand in amazement at the dust-covered donkey rider, not quite understanding the power of his humility or the force of his love. Amen.

We're in a party mood today. And don't you just love a party. The Church Breakfast went extremely well - the men making pancakes and cooking eggs. Teenagers serving and now cleaning up. Good Food. Good fellowship. Even a few jelly beans as a foretaste of the bigger celebration coming up - Easter morning. For the church breakfast, Let us wave our palms and shout Hosanna!

With the children we celebrated our Lenten Carbon Fast. Promises were made by many of you five weeks ago at the beginning of Lent. More promises were made at family night and by the teenagers. Helen Keller gives us courage to fulfill our promises when she said: "I am only one, but I am still one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something." Everyone pitching in, doing their part to help save the environment from pollution and global warming. It all amounts to thousands of tons of carbon not being released into the atmosphere. And we all did a little bit of something. When we come together, what an impact we can have. For our Lenten Carbon Fast, Let us wave our palms and shout Hosanna!

This day of celebration keeps going as we follow Jesus into Jerusalem. There's a parade taking place on the Main Street in the city. People coming out of their houses and shops, trying to get a close up look at what's going on. Women, men and children from out of town are walking in the middle of the street. There's singing and dancing.

The main attraction - a small gray donkey with a man riding on his back smiling and waving to the crowds. Everyone is waving palm branches, shouting hurrah, hurrah. Let us wave our palms and shout "Hosanna / Hosanna in the highest / blessed is he / who comes in the name of the Lord."

Like the people in Jerusalem, we shout, we wave our palms, we sing Alleluia. He is the one the prophets promised, we shout. He has come to save his people, we say:

- He has been chosen by God to be God's servant, the prophet Isaiah announces.
- He will be filled with the spirit of God, he tells us. And that is exactly how we knew him - Love and compassion flowed out of him in abundance, always enough for everyone like the time he feed 5,000 people with a few loaves of bread and some fish. Jesus is the one who shows us that love, compassion and kindness never dry up and when you need them the most they will be there for you. This is God's gift of grace.
- The prophets tell us that: He will not shout or raise his voice or make loud speeches in the streets, like all those other preachers and politicians. We wanted him to stand on a tall box so everyone could see him and hear every word he said. We wanted him to go on tv or make a youtube commercial of the kingdom of God is at hand.
- But, he won't do that. Instead, he ate meals in the local pub to offer God's grace to the people there. He went to family dinner parties and allowed a peasant woman to wash his feet. One at a time, he would heal the sick. He showed mercy to a woman caught in adultery. He prayed with his disciples. There was no shouting or loud speeches. Not by him, our friend and companion.

- He will open the eyes of the blind, bring light to the nations, and lasting justice to all lands. That's what the prophets said. And then on that first Palm Sunday in the city of Jerusalem the people proclaimed: He is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.

Like us, the people in Jerusalem knew the stories about Jesus: His teachings of universal acceptance of others, his awesome ability to welcome the poor, the oppressed, the stranger. The way he would argue with the religious authorities on how it is more godly to help a person in need than to follow ancient traditions. Everyone knew him as a spiritual man who gave them hope. Hope for a better life. Hope for justice and fairness. Hope for forgiveness. Hope for God's love to shine on their lives. Hope to be included in God's kingdom.

The people in the streets went wild - this is the one, they shouted. With him there is hope, they said. Hope for our own future and hope for the wider community we call our home land.

As Jesus rode on his donkey, fulfilling the prophecy of the Messiah coming among the people, the whole city was glowing with praise and adoration. To ride this wave of victory was exhilarating and satisfying to the soul.

We all want to be part of the joyful shouts of the winning side. But, later in the week when Jesus was arrested for causing trouble and 'disturbing the peace' his followers began to turn away. Their alleluia enthusiasm evaporated. Soon his best friends, Peter, James and John, turned away from this Jesus they called the promised One. He was alone. No one by his side except his love of God and love of all people. When he came to trial and was sentenced to death there were no followers standing with him.

A lot will happen between this Sunday and next Sunday, between our initial recognition of Jesus as a healer, teacher and prophet and Jesus as, Emmanuel, God with us. I wonder if we too are afraid of the upcoming events in the life of Jesus, afraid that the presence of God will touch our hearts in new and unexpected ways. And you know what happens when God gets into our hearts, don't you?

When God gets into our hearts, God asks us to change. And I don't know anyone who is enthusiastic about change. We don't like to be asked to be changed, even by God. It is so much nicer to be told, I'm ok. Your ok. Everything is ok. Isn't that lovely. Amen. The end!

But we know that isn't the case. I am not ok all the time. And I would guess that, most likely, you're not ok all the time. And our care for the poor is not ok, our environment isn't ok, our global home land isn't ok.

The great danger of the heart is that we will get stuck in 'an't it awful.' When this happens we slowly turn over our lives, our relationships, our dreams to fate. Whatever happens, happens. But that's not the end. Soon there is a timid little tap, tap, tap in the soul. Then the heart picks up the beat. It's a little louder now. Can you hear the whisper in your heart? Where is the hope? it is asking. The hope of love and compassion, of peace in our hearts.

From Palm Sunday through Easter we watch God at work as Christ shows us the way. This is the way of life, death and new life. The way of celebration, sorrow and new joy. The way of beginnings, endings and new beginnings. This is the way of hope.

On this journey we will be afraid. There will be disappointments. We will be tempted to turn around and go back to the dark side of the room. We will want to run away from the unknown. It will be hard work, but where there is hope we will follow.

Today let us shout Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest in joyful anticipation of the week to come. Amen.