

April 13, 2014 “Jesus Recognized” Matthew 21:1-11

Here we are. It is Palm Sunday. Remembering that the Jewish Sabbath is Saturday, we remember that this is indeed the first day of the new week. Not Monday! Sunday is the first day of the week. The Christian Cause, the Christian movement, the church (small c) does its greatest work on this first day of the week. It (and we) gather, we worship, we praise God’s name, we celebrate by bathing in the Word of God, the Biblical word, His word, we do it publicly, these doors are not locked, no one stands at the door to make sure only members enter, in order that we might begin the week having fueled our faith, having celebrated it, having taken time with all who share our convictions, to submit to what God’s unfailing hands may bring our way in the rest of it.

I borrowed that last line from a very old hymn I am trying to learn. It is the other hymn which makes up the majority of the musical score of the remake of the western movie, “True Grit”. The movie, based on an American novel that was released into the marketplace in the 1960’s, it’s main character with all due respect to iconic John Wayne, is not Marshall Rooster Cogburn. It is the 14 year old girl Mattie Ross who sets out on a journey to see that the man who shot and killed her father is brought to justice. She’s a Presbyterian. And the Cohen brothers in remaking it had a musical score written

for the film which consists of “Leaning On The Everlasting Arms” and this other hymn, “Hold To God’s Unchanging Hand”. It’s lyric celebrates the Biblical theme that God’s love is constant, and that the challenge faced by Christian folk regardless of the year or the era, is remember we are His children. To live and to walk as children of the living God....Holding His Unchanging Hand as we deal with life.

The thing that makes Palm Sunday special is that there is this brief moment, this one time, and it is an emotional time. Upbeat! Very much like the parades that are held after one team wins the championship after a long season, and the unique trials and tests that come of the playoff season. Palm Sunday is that brief moment when the people, common, ordinary people, recognize who Jesus is. With little insight into what it all means they cheer him on His way as what we now call Holy Week begins. It is a moment of light, that is followed by increasing cloud and gloom, until the crucifixion brings the darkness that descends as Jesus dies on the cross.

Sherry’s husband, Pastor Mayhew, and I were talking following choir practice on Wednesday evening. And when two preachers get together to talk, you can count on it, we talk about the sermon we are working on. His title for this morning in Marmora and this afternoon in Cordova Mines is, “Hi Yo Silver, Away!” As a fan of the Fran Striker novels, the

radio series, and the television series, “The Lone Ranger”, I admired his insight. You know and remember the music. William Tell Overture. The sound of hoofbeats...the galloping charge of the horses. It all comes together, the cry, the music, the sounds of the battle, to proclaim....now it begins. With Palm Sunday Holy Week begins. The great lessons taught in the Temple Court Yards. The healing miracles that take place there. The precious gift of the Lord’s Supper. The betrayal, the arrest, the beatings, the trials, the crown of thorns, Calvary!

The heartbreak in trying to cope with the reality of Jesus death. His burial. The unexpected and unbelievable resurrection! Palm Sunday it all begins to unfold. Some would say to unravel. I say it begins to unfold because Jesus has consistently said, He is about, His life on earth is about, His ministry is about redeeming the lost, saving sinners, giving life to the walking dead of humanity. I say Jesus is about saving sinful people, because Jesus said He was about saving sinful people. On, Good Friday, for the time it takes Jesus to pass by them, the crowds are wild in their jubilant recognition that He is God’s servant, doing God’s work. And more than a mere man.

Matthew’s text says that the crowds shouted Hosanna. Mark says they shouted Hosanna. John in his account of the story of salvation says the people shouted Hosanna. It is Hebrew. It means Save. Save us they cried. Save us! At the city

gates of Jerusalem, Jesus riding on a colt, a young donkey that had never been ridden...fulfillment of prophecy....Zechariah chapter 9 verse 9...."See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Save us. Save us. Hosanna. A moment of light. Jesus recognized,...the Messiah.

The parallel with some of the victory parades that belong to the sporting world is apt in this sense. Many who turn up at such events and cheer and shout and dance for joy, are in fact not true fans. Were not at the big game or games. We say they are emotionally caught up in the excitement of what is happening the spectacle, the hype. And there is no doubting there was some of that going on. Some of those who participated on Palm Sunday, this is a unique moment when you just might get away with saying what amounts to "get rid of the Romans" without saying get rid of the Romans! It feels safe to say Hosanna.... It feels safe to say it and shout it and hope something of lasting importance is going to occur. Through the work of the writers of the gospel accounts....Matthew, Mark, Luke and John....we know, and this is why it is so important that we read Scripture and make it of singular importance in our lives....we know Jesus told his followers, his disciples, what was going to happen....and what it would mean. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand on Palm Sunday.

But the crowds, those huge swelling crowds, that had come to Jerusalem from all over the known world, ironically taking advantage of blessings brought about by the Roman Empire (like the Pax Romana, a unique period during which the balance of the Roman Empire is in effect at peace. War, international conflicts have come to a halt. The way the Romans saw it there was no one left for them to conquer. And the system of Roman Roads that made it possible for anyone who wanted to, to be able to travel from one end of the Empire to the other. The city of Rome as the hub for this network of paved roads, guarded by Imperial troops. A safe way to journey.) These crowds shout more than Hosanna.

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” It is a phrase out of Psalm 118. I am going to expand that by reading you that phrase in the context of verses 25 to 27 from Psalm 118. Listen. “O Lord save us. O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.”

Blessed is he who comes in the Lord’s name. With boughs in hand, like Palm branches, join the procession that is part of the festive season, like Passover. The fact is a lot of people in that crowd knew exactly what they were saying,

which is why the Priests in the crowd, the clergy were so upset! They are acknowledging Jesus as Messiah, Son of God, Saviour. And as they perceive Him to be the fulfillment of the prophecies they don't just mouth the words, they take the Palm branches that are at hand and they do what the Scriptures speak about. They are acting out their faith. They are acting out their emotional response to Jesus ministry. They have heard about the raising of Lazarus. They have heard about Jesus healing the sick. If you read on in chapter 21 of Matthew, you discover that when Jesus went to the Temple, the blind and the lame came in significant numbers seeking one thing of Jesus. He healed them. It is all part of Palm Sunday. And as each one is healed there is more shouting and celebrating. Jesus is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna, hosanna in the highest. A moment of light before the darkness which must occur, descends.

Matthew concludes his comments on the parade into Jerusalem by telling us, it was not over just because Jesus continued to move toward the temple. The whole city was stirred. People are asking the question who is this? And it is not as though the question hung in the air in an atmosphere of silence. Everytime the "wow" question is asked, who is this? Someone is answering...Don't be foolish, don't be dumb...this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. The Passover is in

danger of becoming all about Jesus...as it should be.
Hosanna...Save us!

Let us pray;

Lord we thank you for the word pictures drawn and painted by your servants, the writers of the gospels. As we read and remember and celebrate throughout this week, grant us the wisdom of mature faith that realizes the cries of the crowd for salvation were realized in every way. When we remember the crucifixion, and see the very dying form of one do not let our souls be cast down. Help us to see the very dying form of one who gives His life for me, for us, to indeed grant the cry of our hearts, saving us, for now, for here, and for eternity too.
Amen