

Sermon Summary – Sunday 5 April 2023

Palm Sunday: Search Me O God (Calven Celliers)

What happened over 2,000 years ago this upcoming week changed everything. It changed all of history and all of creation. It changed the very present and eternal destiny of humankind. When our Lord Jesus gave His life as a ransom and as a sacrificial love offering for all of us it radically transformed everything.

This was the week that all of heaven had been looking forward to since the fall of man. This was the week that Jesus would wrap up His mission here on earth. Jesus made a way through His death and resurrection for every person born to be born again and filled with His Holy Spirit. Jesus made a way for us to experience human life in a whole new way - cleansed and purified. Today you and I can live a life filled with the presence of the abiding Holy Spirit, because of what Jesus set in motion on what we commemorate this morning. Palm Sunday is the anniversary of the day that Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem on the back of a donkey as scores of followers surrounded Him with praise and palm branches.

In the Gospel of Matthew 21 we read about what Christians for generations have referred to as the *“triumphal entry into Jerusalem.”* **Read Matthew 21: 1 – 11.**

In my research for this teaching, I found out that Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem was not the only procession the city saw that day. Roman historians record that the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, also led a procession into the city of Jerusalem that day. On this occasion, Pilate had travelled with a contingent of Rome’s finest from his preferred headquarters in Caesarea-by-the-Sea, to the stuffy, crowded, provincial capital of the Jews, Jerusalem. Imagine the spectacle of that entry. From the western side of the city, the opposite side from which Jesus enters, Pontius Pilate leads Roman soldiers on horseback and on foot. Drummers beat out the cadence of march. Each soldier was clad in leather armour polished to a high gloss. On each centurion’s head, hammered helmets gleamed in the bright sunlight. At their sides, sheathed in their scabbards, were swords crafted from the hardest steel; and, in their hands, each centurion carried a spear; or if he was an archer, a bow with a sling of arrows across his back.

It was the beginning of Passover, a Jewish festival that the Romans allowed. However, the Romans must have been aware that this festival celebrated the liberation of the Jews from another empire, the empire of Egypt. So, Pilate had to be in Jerusalem, and his presence was meant to send a clear message to anyone who might be plotting against the empire of Rome. The spectacle was meant to intimidate any citizens of Jerusalem who might think twice about joining a rebellion against the Roman empire.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem may or may not have been planned to occur on the same day as Pilate’s procession. Coincidence, or a God-incident?

The two processions provided a contrast that was unmistakable. If Pilate’s procession was meant as a show of military might and strength, Jesus’ procession was meant to show the opposite. The two processions could not be more different in the messages they convey. Pilate, leading Roman centurions, asserts the power and might of the empire of Rome which crushes all who oppose it.

Jesus, riding on a young donkey, embodies the peace and tranquillity that the shalom of God brings to His people. Those who witness both that day will make a choice. They will choose between what this world has to offer; or they will choose to serve the king of a very different kind of kingdom, the kingdom of God.

And so let us take a moment to ask ourselves a question we may never have asked on a Palm Sunday before: *"If I had been in Jerusalem that day, and had seen both processions passing by, which would I have chosen to follow?"* Because that is the choice, we make each day. We either live for ourselves in the world or we live for Jesus in the Kingdom. Jesus set in motion this day, a way for us to experience life on this side of eternity in a whole new way. Two processions. Two world views. Two choices. Two very different destinations. Which will you choose?

Read Matthew 21:9.

Hoshana, a Hebrew word meaning *"help, I pray"* or *"save, I pray,"* was a shout of praise or adoration. The crowd was lifting up praise to Christ. They were shouting *"praise to you, Son of David"*. For some these shouts of praise were true and acceptable expressions of worship; for others they were hollow hosannas – hollow hosannas which were empty words that outwardly appeared beautiful but lacked substance.

Consider what hollow Hosanna's look like in a practical way; for many that day their *'Hosannas'* turned to *'Crucify him'*, in less than a week.

Hollow Hosannas consists of...

Insincere Praise – That which is insincere is that which is not genuine. Praise that is insincere is nothing more than flattery, and God cannot stomach flattery. Half-hearted or insincere praise does not honour God. Our holy, omniscient God will not pretend that we are honouring Him when we really are not. We can praise the Lord with great emotion and energy but if it does not stem from our whole hearts and is not founded in truth it is nothing more than collective clatter. **Read Matthew 15: 7 – 9.** People make a big show of saying the right thing, but their heart isn't in it. They act like they're worshipping me, but they don't mean it.

Following on from that, hollow hosannas consist of incongruent praise – Incongruent praise means inconsistency between words and deeds, between saying I love you Lord and demonstrating that love in actions and behaviour. Sadly, a lot of people play at praise, and you can fool everyone around you by going through the motions of praise, but you cannot fool God. He knows whether or not your life matches your words. Perhaps that day as Jesus rode into Jerusalem and He heard the hosanna's of the crowd, the words He'd once spoken about true and false disciples rang in His ears – **Read Matthew 7:21.**

"If you had been in Jerusalem that day, and had seen both processions passing by, which would you have chosen to follow?" Because that is the choice, we make each day. We either live for ourselves in the world, offering insincere, incongruent praise; or we genuinely live for Jesus, echoing His prayer, *'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, in my life as it is in heaven.'* Two processions. Two world views. Two choices. Two very different destinations. Which will you choose?

And so, as we come to the table of the Lord this Palm Sunday, I am reminded of the words of Charles Spurgeon in his last Palm Sunday teaching when he said, *"Assuredly, this honour paid to our Lord was passing strange; a gleam of sunlight in a day of clouds, a glimpse of summer-tide in a long and dreary winter. He that was, as a rule, "despised and rejected of men", was for the moment surrounded with the acclaim of the crowd. All men saluted him that day with their Hosannas, and the whole city was*

moved. It was a gala day for the disciples, and a sort of coronation day for their Lord... May the good Spirit impart instruction to us by this strange stir and singular scene! May some divine impulse come to us out of this riding of our lowly King into Jerusalem! His triumphant ride was a type of His entering the renewed heart. I pray that you, by the listening, will be led to pray for His coming into your heart."

Self-examination is an important part of living as an authentic Christian. Deceiving ourselves is easy and comfortable. We want to believe ourselves better, smarter, and more ethical than we really are, so careful, Spirit-directed self-examination keeps us honest with ourselves and with God – **Read 2 Corinthians 13:5.**

As we share in Communion, and prepare ourselves for Easter, I suggest that we come to the Lord's table with the same attitude as the psalmist, King David – **Read 139:23 & 24.**

Though a part of us resists dealing with what is wrong in our hearts, I know that I need to see my sin as God sees it, so that I might confess and be forgiven, and so that I might turn from my sin to follow the Lord more completely. I don't want my Hosanna's to be hollow, I don't want my praise to be insincere or incongruent in any way. In asking God to search us, we are inviting him also to open our hearts so that we might receive the conviction of his Spirit. We are saying, *"Point out anything in us that offends you, and we will listen to you! Hoshana – help me; Hoshana, save me I pray"*

May we come to a deeper knowledge and understanding of the amazing nature of our awesome God, for He is the only source of grace and truth, mercy and love, peace and hope, salvation for the soul, and life eternal.

I pray that you, by the listening, will be led to pray for His coming into your heart – Communion.