

## St. Andrew's Church – March 28, 2010

Sermon "Palms to Passion" – The Rev. Doug Kendall

Lord God,

May the words of my mouth,

and the thoughts and meditations of all of our hearts,

be acceptable to you, our God and our creator. AMEN

It is Palm Sunday again.

Winter is over, spring is under way... soon I hope,

Easter is coming up next Sunday.

That means this is the beginning of Holy week,

so we celebrate Palm Sunday.

What do you think of when you hear talk of Palm Sunday?

It has always seemed to me like it must have been a lot of fun.

There is a festive atmosphere about it.

It is light and exciting,

Jesus is riding on a donkey, happy faces all around.

But, we have to admit,

that what we do here, is not really like the first procession is it.

The original festive Palm Sunday parade began

as families were making their pilgrimage into Jerusalem

for the holy season of Passover.

Parents, grandparents and children and grandchildren all around,

making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem together.

As they were all filing into Jerusalem,

Jesus arrived on a donkey.

Soon the Palm branches were swaying

and the cloaks were being strewn on the ground,  
and the crowd was shouting.

Yes, the crowd was shouting out things as Jesus was riding into Jerusalem.

**"Hosanna to the son of David.**

**Hosanna to the Son of David."**

As we hear it today, it sounds harmless enough.

In fact one of the more contemporary translations translates this phrase,

“Horary for the Son of David”

That translation gets the excitement of the phrase,

but something is missing.

Do you know what hosanna actually means?

A couple of weeks ago as the children and young people  
were beginning to prepare this morning’s call to worship,

I was over run with people at coffee hour asking me what Hosanna means.

Well, It means "Save us now we pray".

That sounds a little different from “horary” doesn’t it.

That doesn’t sound like what you might expect to hear at a parade.

"Save us now we pray, Son of David."

Knowing what hosanna means

is beginning to change the atmosphere of the parade isn't it.

Maybe there is something more than a parade going on here.

Perhaps it is not entirely a festive event.

perhaps there is some deeper meaning,

perhaps something dangerous even.

We read, **“A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road,**

**and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.**

**The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,  
"Save us now we pray, Son of David!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Save us now we pray highest heaven!"**

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem long ago,  
it was not a happy festive time in the history of the Jewish people.  
They were looking forward to a Messiah coming,  
for a great leader who would save them  
from the Roman occupation forces.  
Seeing Jesus riding on a donkey was a messianic symbol for them.  
The Prophet Zechariah, when he wrote the words,  
***"Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey."***

was writing about a great king from David's line  
who would save the Jewish people from their oppression  
and suffering.  
A strong and mighty king who would do away with war chariots  
and bring peace to the nations.

**Save us now we pray, Son of David,  
Save us now Messiah**

was the chant of the crowd as Jesus rode into Jerusalem.  
This was not, as many of us have often thought,  
just a nice sunny afternoon parade for Jesus,  
with people shouting "Horary for Jesus".  
What we witness on Palm Sunday looks a lot like the beginning of a revolution.

In fact, if a Jewish rebellion were to begin against the Roman occupiers,  
the logical time would be during one of the great festivals.

During the festivals Jerusalem was packed with people  
from all walks of Jewish life.

There would be strict orthodox Pharisees,  
part of the establishment.

There would be regular everyday faithful Jews  
from the surrounding towns.

And there would be all kinds of prophets and messianic leaders,  
rebels from Nazareth and Galilee, religious zealots  
all of them longing for release from the Romans.

You see rebellion was part of the Jewish history.

When things had become horrendous under a previous ruler,  
there had been a revolt, the Maccabean revolt,  
and the overlords have been slaughtered,  
and the Temple had been reclaimed in the name of God.

**"Save us now we pray, Son of David",**

the crowd was calling as Jesus made his way into town.

"Begin the rebellion, we are ready to fight, if you will lead us."

As the procession arrived at the outskirts of Jerusalem,

the Holy City brimming with faithful Jews,

it was apparent that something was happening.

Matthew says that the whole city was in turmoil,

a more accurate translation would be

that Jerusalem was shaken to its foundations by Jesus arrival.

The term turmoil is the same word that is used for earthquake.

The story has been building to this point, we are coming to a climax.

The crowd is coming into Jerusalem the Holy City,

All along the way the crowd has been calling Jesus

"Son of David" one of the names used for the Messiah.

This is the turning point it would seem.

We read, **"When he entered Jerusalem,**

**the whole city was shaken to its foundations, asking, "Who is this?"**

At this moment we expect the crowd to say,

"The Son of David".

That is what they have been chanting all along the way.

Son of David, the Messiah, the one who is going to save us now!!

And yet another answer comes out of the crowd's mouth

The crowds said, **"This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."**

Now where did that come from?

Why is he now "The prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee,"

rather than the Son of David whom they were crying out to save them?

In a word, the crowd changed their cry because of fear.

Fear, the second most challenging obstacle in the world, next to apathy.

Maybe the crowd was afraid of what might happen to Jesus,

maybe they were afraid for themselves,

maybe they were afraid of the chaos that might come into their lives,

if Jesus really was the Messiah,

but for some reason when they got into Jerusalem, their tune changed.

He was no longer the Son of David,

the Messianic figure who would save them,

he was now just the prophet Jesus from Galilee.

The crowd seems to have become afraid of what might happen,

of what it would mean to their lives if Jesus really was the Messiah,

so they called him simply a prophet, from Galilee.

In Jesus day it was very clear

what the people on the road to Jerusalem wanted.

They wanted to be saved from the oppression of the Roman authorities.

They wanted the freedom to worship in the Temple  
as their ancestors did.

They wanted to be release from bondage.

And yet when the element of fear and threat was introduced,  
they changed their call, and toned it down.

What does it mean for us today to say “Hosanna to the Son of David?”

How can we even begin to say these words in our time and place?

Or is there any point in saying these words at all.

Perhaps we should just stay comfortable

with our own understanding of Palm Sunday

and consider this a parade day

an opportunity to watch as the children march around.

A Sunday to smile and maybe wave palm branches like the children.

In our day and age,

is there really anything we would cry out to the Son of David for  
asking for help?

"Save us now we pray, Son of David."

Save us from what, what is threatening us today?

Perhaps we are like the crowd so long ago,

when we think about who Jesus is,

when people ask us who Jesus is for us,

we can simply say with the crowd,

Jesus? He was a prophet from Nazareth in say Galilee.”

I believe that one of the biggest problem facing us as the church,  
Is that we have managed to become very self sufficient people,  
who in most cases, do not call out for help from God.

We can handle things pretty well ourselves.

Our lives are really pretty comfortable, on the whole.

Besides, if we really truly call out to the Son of David for help,  
it could mean chaos,

it could mean a total disruption of our lives,

It could turn out like the famous temple scene with Jesus,  
financial systems being turned upside down,  
total chaos.

I don't really want to risk losing my home,

my cars, my pension,

my stuff... do I?

Do any of us really want that?

Wouldn't it be easier in some ways

if we were in the same situation

as the ancient Jews on the way to Jerusalem.

Their plight was very real,

what do we have to cry out about?

Perhaps if we were Afghanis, or Israelis, Palestinians, Iraqis

people living on the border between India and Pakistan

this cry would make more sense,

"Save us now we pray, Son of David.

But we are not.

We are comfortable North Americans, with almost everything we want,  
and certainly in many ways much more than we need.

Perhaps what is threatening us the most today,  
is our own lives, or own self sufficient ways,  
our own consumer society,  
a consumer mentality and economy that cannot grow indefinitely.

Perhaps when we call out,  
**“Save us now we pray, Son of David”**,  
we are really asking to be saved from ourselves,  
and our own self sufficient ways.

We are really asking to be saved from the idea that we are all important,  
and we have reached a point where no longer need God.

Perhaps if we are bold enough,  
we too can continue to call out,  
Hosanna to the Son of David, Save us now we pray Son of David,  
because we may just be our own biggest problem, if we are willing to face it.

As we come to the end of the season of Lent,  
the end of the season of self reflections and discovery,  
and enter into holy week,  
let's take the time to consider who we are as God's dependent children,  
and who we are in relation to God's other children around the world.

Hosanna in the highest,  
Hosanna to the Son of David,  
Save us now we pray, son of David, Son of God.

In Jesus name, AMEN