

PALM SUNDAY/PASSION SUNDAY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
March 30, 1980

KING FOR A DAY

...the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"
Luke 19:37-38

What a day when Jesus entered the Holy City in triumph! What a strange procession that was winding its way to the gates of the great Jerusalem. There at the head was that quiet figure - riding along on a borrowed donkey while all the crowds were running to see. At first they were curious - but soon they were shouting and singing and turning the whole place upside down for him.

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna to the Son of David! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! No doubt about it -- they were shouting praise of love and loyalty to their new king. Everyone grabbed anything he could get his hands on -- branches from the trees; clothing from their backs. And they carpeted his path with these things.

There was no limit to their enthusiasm that day! What a spontaneous parade they had created! What a demonstration to behold!

But ~~the demonstration~~ - the demonstration only lasted only one day! Their loyalty was only a flash in the pan. The Lord of heaven and earth rode down the road that day, and this was the best they could do -- praise him for one day!
HE WAS KING FOR A DAY!

As the camera pans back and forth on that surging crowd - is it possible to find faces we recognize. Maybe mine? Maybe yours? Have you and I helped to make history what it is - caught up in momentary enthusiasm?!? Pledging

allegiance to Christ one day, only to let him down completely the next?

Let no one suffer any illusions about Christ -- he is the King all right! But his kingship is often strange to many people. Because Christ's kingship is not defined by the glamour and passing emotion usually associated with kings.

Let's face it -- these people wanted a glamorous Christ. They wanted a big-name, pompous king -- who would make them richer, and more powerful, and more glamorous to the world! They really didn't want a carpenter from Nazareth, who mingled with the wrong crowd and challenged their way of life. Is it any wonder that Jesus was only attractive as king for a day?!?

Yet that crowd is not all so different today. Many people are still looking for the big-name Christ. They often join only those churches with big name preachers with big degrees who use big theological terms to impress everyone of their theological girth! And yet we're told that Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a donkey to impress everyone that his ministry was to serve, rather than be served. Is it any wonder that he was only king for a day?!?

Yes - how easy it is to get caught up in the glamour and emotion of the Hosannas on Palm Sunday! How easy it is to make Christ the King when we are inside our beautiful sanctuaries listening to our beautiful choirs and pipe organs.

Yes, How easy to claim Christ as King when we're with a large crowd along a parade route! But what happened to that crowd when the shouts of "HOSANNA" died out?!? How could those same people be shouting "Crucify Him" a few days later?!? Amazing isn't it -- how fast a crowd can shift when the glamour and emotion passes away!

Today - you and are a along that parade route. Yes today we are shouting our praises and Hosannas for Christ the King!! But how will you stand with Christ tomorrow?? If the winds of life shift for you overnight -- if you should encounter tragedy - or crisis - or even death of a loved one -- will Christ still be King??? Or will you turn your back on him??

Or perhaps, like some others in the crowd, you will not turn against Christ -- but you will fall silent when the tide of public opinion runs against him. The temptation is always strong to run and hide when the going gets rough!

For many of you here today, Palm Sunday was possibly your day of confirmation. I remember that it was mine. It was a great day - filled with great praises for the 35-40 in my confirmation class. But for some of those Christ was King for only that day. They pledged allegiance to Christ and his church -- only to turn around and mock and spit at him.

For 50 years -- we have heard many crowds sing Hosannas and praises to Christ their king in this place -- for 40 years in this sanctuary. Hundreds of confirmands have made promises before God and this congregation. But we all know that many of those were only caught up in the glamour and passing emotion of the moment.

People for centuries have proclaimed Christ as king -- only to turn around and live by their own rules rather than his. You need only look in your bulletins this morning for a simple illustration of it. People join the body of Christ to be his followers - his servants. And yet when called upon to do a simple task like attending over the nursery a few Sundays per year -- all of a sudden they change their tune. It's so easy to make Christ King on Palm Sunday, as long as he doesn't ask me to follow him on Monday.

Well - you can see why this Sunday is not only Palm Sunday -- it is also Passion Sunday. Because from the very beginning -- to this very day... Jesus' followers have too often made him King for only a day. And that's why we cannot celebrate this day without looking at the cross-- because our sinfulness continues to create the necessity for the cross. All the shouting and hosannas in the world CANNOT COVER UP THE FACT

that each of us has truly let Christ down. Each of us has failed to carry our share of Christ's ministry. Each of us has denied Christ when it was unpopular to take a stand for him. Each of us has betrayed Christ when we have sold out his love for our own egotistical profit. Each of us has pounded in a nail when we have ~~oversold him~~ his power, his values, his servanthood, his church by just becoming another silent bystander in this crowd or that crowd.

Yes - today is a day for shouting "Hosanna" -- but it is also a day for getting down on our knees and confessing Jesus Christ is Lord -- a day for thanking God from the depth of our hearts for his willingness to take a stand for us on the cross. Yes - today we shout Hosanna to the King -- but also thank God that he was big enough to humble himself and become obedient unto death - even the death of a cross.

Yes - Christ has died, and God forgives. Christ lives and God rules. Christ intercedes for the world, and God hears. And what God really needs to hear today is more than Hosannas.

He needs to hear Christian people who really know Christ, who trust Christ, who love Christ, and who will follow Christ. God needs to hear people who will accept the forgiveness of their sins in the meekness of Christ - and then turn around and pledge an unwavering allegiance to Christ **BY HELPING TO BEAR THE CROSS.**

This world needs that kind of crowd today *and everyday*. A crowd that can shout "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" But a crowd that can do more than shout and sing. A crowd that is willing to learn from Christ - from his self-giving. A crowd that is willing to learn how to live and how to die: with love!

AMEN

PALM SUNDAY/PASSION SUNDAY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
April 15, 1984
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WHY ME?"

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46

These words just don't seem to fit do they?? They just don't seem to be right for Palm Sunday!?! They're too early! We don't want to hear the words of the cross until Good Friday! Today, Palm/Passion Sunday/ we want to avoid the Passion; we want to avoid the death of Christ; we want only to shout the songs of triumph and victory! Today, we want the jubilation of the "Hosannas" without any of the anger of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Let's face it - we just don't want to face Golgatha yet!!!

In many ways, our feelings about today's gospel are much like the feelings of Jesus' followers in his day. Above all - they had no intentions of facing any more defeats ... surely no golgathas! The Jews had been waiting and waiting for their victorious Messiah. For more than five centuries they had been living in HOPE -- in a hope for the return to the glory days of the United Kingdom under David and Solomon. They had suffered enough defeat -- they had been conquered by the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, and now the Romans! At last -- their hope was arriving! The long-expected Messiah, the Christ, was coming and would lead them through a victorious revolution and restore Israel to power through a military victory! Many of Jesus' followers were looking forward to a militant, violent, triumphant Messiah; is it any wonder that those yelling "Hosanna" could soon be screaming "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

But let's not make these early followers into the bad guys and "we" the good guys! We are not at all different from those so-called Palm Sunday People! Much like them, we also want life to be forever victorious! We always want to be the winners -- many times the violent winners. In fact, just in 1981 -- we named one of our newest, most devastating nuclear submarines the "U.S.S. Corpus Christi." The U.S.S. Body of Christ which carries enough nuclear weapons to destroy the entire populations of France, Germany, and Spain! Yes, we

dare not see ourselves as the righteous ones -- who see the Christ in the fulness of his light! Just like the faithful before us -- we often want leaders and EVEN WANT A FAITH that will totally protect us from any tragedies, losses or sorrows in life. We do not want to face up to the fact that TO REALLY LIVE IS TO DAILY RISK LOSING LIFE AND LOSING ALL OF OUR SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS! That's just the way it is -- and God never said it would any different!

But - we dare never feel bad about our feelings of losing -- of losing life or of losing significant relationships! TO LIVE IS TO ALWAYS FEAR LOSING LIFE ... AND LOSING SIGNIFICANT OTHERS! In fact, when we have those fears it's a good sign. It's a sign that we are really alive -- that we really care -- that we really love. It's because of that fear of losing THAT DOCTORS WORK SO HARD TO HEAL US -- that fear motivates people to love and to care!! Those fears of losing enable us to have the capacity to love and to show mercy for others. Because to lose life, to lose a significant relationship REALLY HURTS! And nothing could proclaim that hurt MORE GRAPHICALLY than Jesus' own words when he says: "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTANI?" "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Or said more simply, "My God, WHY ME?"

Those words so dramatically show us that Jesus himself struggled with the loss of physical life. He struggled with the feelings of loss...of abandonment ...of forsakenness... of emptiness that come with significant human losses! "My God, My God, why me?" Here was where life hit the bottom for Jesus! This was the worst of the bad experiences of his final week.

Life became dark when Judas betrayed him. Life became darker when the people wanted Barabbas set free. Life became even darker when Pilate washed his hands and pronounced the death sentence. But there was no darkness like the moment on the cross when Jesus cried out, "Eli, Eli, lama Sabachtani?" It was the ultimate cry of despair... of abandonment, of loneliness!

There is only ONE WORD from the cross in the gospels of Matthew and Mark -- only this word of forsakenness -- only this word of hurt. I think Matthew and Mark wanted to graphically convey HOW MUCH JESUS EXPERIENCED THE REALITY OF HUMAN LIFE. This word, like no other words from scripture, makes so clear to us that Jesus knows what it's like to be human.

Jesus experienced the reality of forsakeness...of feeling deserted, overlooked, left alone by man and God! And which one of us in this room has not had that experience -- possibly some of us have had it many times! There is nothing more devastating than feeling forsaken -- especially feeling forsaken by God! To lose life, to lose a significant relationship IS TRULY ONE OF THE MOST DEVASTATING REALITIES OF LIVING! The feelings of forsakeness can truly be the longest midnights of our lives!

This past week several members of our lay visitation team attended a workshop led by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff, from Birmingham, Michigan. She offered an emotionally gripping story of her feelings of forsakeness in the loss of her ten year old son. She tells the complete story in her book, The Bereaved Parent. It is so obvious that this loss shook the foundations of her relationship to God, to her family, and to many others. During those days of emptiness, she like Christ, often asked: My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

Over a million youth each year forsake their families by running away from home. Certainly a parent asks, "Why me?" A mother occasionally forsakes a new child by leaving it on a doorstep or putting it in a garbage can. If that child could talk, he would truly ask: "WHY ME, LORD?"

We are told that before John Hinkely's attempted assassination of President Reagan he was possibly responding to his mother's deparate response to him as she left him at the airport and said: "Don't ever come home again." How would any of us have felt to hear that from a mother?? Or to turn the tables and have a son or daughter say to us: "Mom/Dad, I'm never going to speak to you again!" There can be no greater feeling of forsakeness!

Last year a young woman entered a tavern to buy a package of cigarettes. Four young men grabbed her, tore off her clothes, and raped her on a billiard table while 15 others watched. Imagine her feelings of forsakenness -- not only by those present -- but from the whole world THAT SUCH A CONDITION COULD EVEN EXIST IN A CIVILIZED, FAITHFUL SOCIETY!

Right here at Hope Church -- there are many of our members who for one reason or another have felt forsaken by God and his people of Hope. Those feelings are very real and cannot

be overlooked. It is one of the reasons that we have begun the LAY VISITATION TRAINING SEMINARS -- to better equip one another to CARE FOR THOSE FEELING ALONE...LOST...OVERLOOKED... FORSAKEN by God and his people.

Yes - we dare never tell others that their feelings of forsakenness are not real! Such feelings are one of the most common human experiences of life -- many times even more common than our feelings of being loved! Above all - we dare never insinuate that forsaken-feelings are a reflection of unfaithfulness -- for to say this would be to claim that our Lord himself was unfaithful!

The feelings of forsakenness need to be expressed ... and need to be heard. But as God's faithful -- we dare not stop with feelings. As important as it is to express these feelings, God also offers us SOME FACTS OF FAITH which help us overcome the feelings of abandonment!

Fact #1 is that God chose to totally identify with our human condition! God could have intervened at Calvary -- he could have removed Jesus from the moment of forsakenness! But God chose another way! He chose to allow Jesus to die for us -- he allowed Jesus to experience our human forsakenness so that we might fully experience his divine forgiveness! The cross is the cost of our conversion paid by God. God did not chose the easy way -- he chose the stinking and hurtful reality of death on the cross!

The Gospel of Matthew vividly shows that God doesn't avoid the stink and hurt of life. He becomes part of it! In Jesus Christ, God experienced the forsakenness of life! This was not a fake or puppet experience; it was the total agony of feeling alone...feeling rejected...feeling abandoned by man and God. As for me, and I hope for you, this reality makes me feel a tremendous intimacy with the one I call my Lord and Savior! Here is one Lord and Savior who has known my pain and yours.

But that intimacy also brings forth Fact #2: God's healing of Jesus' forsakenness did not happen through avoidance of the pain -- by running away from the cross. The same fact is true for you and me. The healing of our forsaken feelings does not happen through avoidance of the pain -- by running away from the hurts and the emptiness. God's healing does not occur THROUGH AVOIDANCE, but rather THROUGH ABSORPTION! BY SHARING OUR PAIN WITH OTHERS!!

It has taken psychologists and many other human helpers centuries to promote what God was promoting on Calvary -- YOU CAN'T RUN AWAY FROM THE FORSAKENNESS OF LIFE. YOU MUST DEAL WITH IT -- YOU MUST LET GOD AND HIS PEOPLE SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR PAIN AND FORSAKENNESS!

That's why Jesus established the mission of the church -- so that God's people would not feel abandoned and forsaken in their moments of suffering in life. God has not created the world without the realities of suffering and forsakenness in life; he has intentionally established his body on earth KNOWN AS THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE CHURCH, to absorb the hurts and the brokenness of our losses in life.

As your pastor, I have truly found that the intimacy of my relationship with each of you is directly correlated to your willingness and mine to share our feelings of forsakenness! For those who have shared their hurts and honest feelings of forsakenness -- those are the relationships that have truly experienced love and support! Those who hide their feelings-- those who hide behind the veneer of having it all together -- for the most part -- those relationships cannot grow -- because those have been relationships of AVOIDANCE rather than ABSORPTION!

Thanks be to God that he has given us the church-- has given us each other. For the church is not the sanctuary for God's super people, but rather his hospital for the forsaken and lonely and hurting and sinful of the world! There are many times in this hospital when there are not WORDS adequate enough to treat the conditions of forsakenness! It is at that moment that God offers us the healing presence of holding, of hugging, and of his mystical, forgiving presence through the Sacraments! These are God's victorious expressions of hope even in the midst of hell!

But God offers one more fact of faith that is far greater than his body on earth! And this fact overcomes all our feelings of forsakenness! Namely, God never leaves us in the condition of the stink, pain, and abandonment of the world. He never leaves us alone -- neither in life, nor in death! Much as he promised his son -- so he promises us that WE ARE WITH HIM NOW AND FOREVERMORE! There is nothing that can separate us from his love! That is the ultimate Word of Hope from God-- the word of the resurrection -- and we'll save the significance of that word for next Sunday!

AMEN

PASSION/PALM SUNDAY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor
April 8, 1990

"TAKING A DEEPER LOOK!"

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in this human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." Philippians 2:5-8

How many of you know the name Leonardo DaVinci? Do you associate his name with the painting of "The Last Supper?" Were you aware that it took him three years to do that painting? Did any of you know that "The Last Supper" was actually painted on the dining room wall of the Monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie? That was a real revelation to me -- I had always thought the Last Supper was painted on canvass. How many of you knew that the dimensions for DaVinci's mural were 14 by 30 feet?? (That means his mural alone is about twice the size of most of our dining room walls!)

Just 20 years after DaVinci completed this famous painting, it was already deteriorating. The Italian humid summers, the flooding canals, the icy winters, the fog and smoke pollution caused flaking, fading, and blurring of this masterpiece. Then in 1656 - the monks needed a larger kitchen door to the dining room -- so they cut off Jesus' legs. In 1796, French troops shot arrows at the apostles' pictures. And in 1943, an Allied bomb blasted most of the building, but miraculously the mural was saved because of sand bags against that wall.

During the past 500 years -- six attempts have been made to restore the painting. But most of them have merely added buildup or greater distortion to the mural. But at the present time in Milan, Dr. Pinin Brombilla has been working for nine years with scalpels, tweezers, and a magnifying glass to uncover the original. Her work was preceded by a multitude of scientific examinations of the wall -- including solvents, hygrometers, infrared cameras, electronic sensors, ultra sound -- including 200,000 sonar readings of the wall to determine its cracks and craters. Now Dr. Brombilla has been slowly progressing with the restoration process -- completing the area the size of a postage stamp each day. Can you imagine -- daily going to work for nine years ... and each day completing restoration the size of a postage stamp!?!

You're all wondering -- why in the world is Martyn spending all of this time with DaVinci's mural. What does this have to do with the beginning of this year's Holy Week pilgrimmage on Passion Sunday??

Well, in reality it's what we're about here every Sunday morning ... and every other time we gather in this or any other place for worship. Christian worship is always a RESTORATION PROJECT - a restoration of God's love and mercy, of trust and obedience in God. We come here every week so that we might TAKE A DEEPER LOOK at what we believe and confess to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. After all, 2000 years separate us from the life of Jesus Christ and the apostolic faith of the Bible. That means we are living with 2000 years of filters and traditions, of translations and interpretations, of conversations and opinions. All of these layers of time and history have a way of distorting the real life of Jesus. We need far more than nine years of diligent work to UNCOVER the real meanings of our faith. We need a lifetime to ask: WHO IS THIS JESUS? WHAT DID HE DO FOR US? WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO FOR HIM?

These are the perennial questions of the faithful! And each and every week -- including Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, and all the rest -- each week we are but getting another postage stamp glimpse of the truth of our faith. Unfortunately - some people think they can worship once or twice a year ... and then they have the whole story. What a delusion when people have that kind of mindset! Imagine if Dr. Brombilla approached DaVinci's painting that way -- it would never be restored. Likewise, faithful disciples never tire of asking the same questions week after week in worship: WHO IS THIS JESUS? WHAT HAS HE DONE FOR US? WHAT ARE WE TO DO FOR HIM?

And just like this week's text from Philippians -- every week the revelation of Scripture gives US another postage stamp answer to these questions. So we ask again today: WHO IS THIS JESUS? And Philippians answers: "though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped!" Do you see how this passage gives us a clearer picture of the identity of Jesus? What kind of Lord ... what kind of Christ figure would you trust the most?? To whom would you really give your greatest allegiance?

Do you find yourself attracted to those personalities who see themselves as the "high and mighty?" I don't know about you -- but as for me, I don't have much time at all for people who are constantly flaunting their stature, their greatness, their superiority! Over and over and over again -- when people are asked in this congregation what they like about Michaels and Martyn (and Meckley when he was here) -- the response is always the same: THEY ARE DOWN TO EARTH, THEY ARE REACHABLE, THEY ARE REAL, THEY ARE FULLY HUMAN!

And who is this Jesus? - "He is the one who even though he had the form of God, yet he did NOT claim equality with God." Quite to the contrary -- he claimed equality with US! When confronted by the devil to turn stones into bread -- Jesus did not resort to almighty powers from God ... he did not throw himself down from the pinnacle ... he did not seek divine power and glory in this world!

Obviously, Jesus could have turned those stones into bread, he could have played "superman" from the pinnacle -- but then Jesus would be counting himself equal with God. And that would make him far less approachable as our Lord and Savior. Instead, Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey hearing shouts of Hosanna; and five days later he departs from Jerusalem carrying his own cross to shouts of "Crucify Him." He would not become the "Macho" god that many people wanted him to be. Contrary to all the worldly images of greatness, he identifies greatness with being a servant ... one who empties himself for the good of others.

Today, like every Sunday, we TAKE A DEEPER LOOK at this person of Jesus. We take out our tweezers and scalpels and we scrape away all the distortions that would make Jesus into a macho god. Instead of one who was bent on grasping all he could get for himself ... instead of seizing the world for his own glory -- he emptied himself by becoming a servant!

And here's where we begin to UNCOVER answers to the second question of every Sunday restoration: WHAT HAS HE DONE FOR US? St. Paul answers to the church at Philippi: "He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant; he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross." 2000 years has a profound way of distorting the real purpose of Jesus' life and ministry. Layers and layers of cultural traditions have sometimes almost obliterated the most essential expressions of Jesus' life. As we enter this Holy Week, the predominant theme of our society is to delight in Easter bunnies and egg hunts. Easter for many others will be little more than a season of agricultural renewal. Obviously, Christians celebrate spring and the renewal of the earth. But to see the real meaning of Easter requires a MUCH DEEPER LOOK than seeing tulips and Easter lillies and red-breasted robins.

Jesus does not enter Jerusalem to lead some royal bunny parade -- he enters Jerusalem to die. And he doesn't like that confrontation with death any more than you or I would. But only through his death will humanity learn the true meaning of God's dominion over life. The human understanding of dominion is through exaltation -- thru self-glorification ... by being the biggest, the toughest, the one with the greatest net worth, the one at the top of the heap! The divine understanding of dominion IS NOT EXALTATION, BUT RATHER HUMILITATION. "Emptying yourself for the sake of others ... finding your life by losing it."

It's like the story of the crown prince who was heir to the throne. During one of his routine visits when royalty was expected to rub shoulders with commoners - he spied a beautiful woman who captured his heart. He desperately wanted to get to know her; he wanted her to get to know him. But he knew that his wealth and his position would only frustrate the whole process. She would be totally intimidated by a prince.

He realized there was only one way: he would have to discard his royal stature; he would have to take on the look and the lifestyle of a commoner. So he took a back route into the village and began searching for a commoner's job. Finally the blacksmith hired him and he spent his days shoeing horses and sweating over the forge. He rented a small room with a family of seven. And then he took every opportunity he could to see the young woman, without forcing himself upon her. He talked with her; he walked through the fields with her; he spent months and months gaining her trust. Finally he felt brave enough to propose. She was very pleased, but turned him down.

So another year went by with the prince sweating over the forge ... still living in one small room, still existing off the meager income of a blacksmith's attendant. Finally, the young woman accepted his proposal, confessing that she loved him. Only then could the prince begin to tell her that she would soon be moving to a bigger house.

That is dominion by humiliation. That is precisely what Jesus Christ DOES FOR YOU AND FOR ME. He does not overwhelm us with his power and glory and exalted stature as God of the universe. He overpowers us by becoming a servant -- by being merciful rather than magnanimous, by being compassionate rather than cocksure, by being obedient even unto death SO THAT WE CAN BE ABSOLUTELY CONFIDENT THAT HE IS A FORGIVING LORD! Only dominion by humiliation leads to new life; dominion by force leads to war, leads to jealousy, leads to brutality, leads to fear and fragmentation. The RISEN CHRIST of Easter Sunday without the HUMILIATED JESUS of Good Friday is a hoax! What a hoax Easter would be if God had intervened and rescued Jesus before he emptied himself on the cross. There can be no new life without first tasting the bitterness of death! There can be no life for a butterfly without death first for the caterpillar! There can be no everlasting love of God on earth without servants who are first willing to pay the price! There can be no love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things WITHOUT SERVANTS WHO FIRST BECOME HUMBLE AND OBEDIENT UNTO THE DEATH OF SELF! What a hoax Easter would be if we announced an empty tomb without a crucified Christ!

Passion Sunday takes us beyond a parade of Hosannas ... it leads us to an old rugged cross where we again learn that "might does not make right" in the kingdom of God. Again we take out our scalpels and tweezers and scrape off another distortion seen deeper in the picture of Holy Week: RUTHLESS POWER AND FORCE DOES NOT REDEEM ANYONE OR ANYTHING IN THIS WORLD. The one who emptied himself and became obedient even unto death ... he is the One who has shown that only the servant of others can make this AN EXALTED AND REDEEMED WORLD OF ABIDING LOVE AND PEACE.

SO, WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO ... NOW THAT WE KNOW WE HAVE BEEN REDEEMED BY THIS SUFFERING SERVANT?? St. Paul says, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and confess that he is our Lord."

I think we all know what that means - that means that no other person, no other name, no other allegiance, no other relationship, no other thing in all creation should be given more honor or glory than Christ himself! That's the biggest area of distortion in most of the pictures of our lives with Christ. For most of us have allowed all kinds of powers and principalities to cover up and distort the name and person of Jesus Christ. We bow to our bosses, we kneel before the almighty dollar, we kiss the feet of the pursuit of pleasure -- and only if there's some time left over **DO WE KNEEL BEFORE THE CHRIST AND CONFESS HIM AS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR.**

Here's where we really need to get out the scalpels and tweezers and scrape away all those things that have taken prominence over Jesus Christ. 2000 years have allowed us to color over Christ and crowd him out of the picture with our own pleasures and pursuits. We have learned to name the name of Jesus only when its convenient or to our advantage -- only when we want to get something, rather than because we are his sacrificial servants. In fact, some have almost totally obliterated the picture of Christ in their lives; they only look at him once or twice a year. It's no wonder that they have a distorted view of God and his son. They've only uncovered one small postage stamp of a 14 by 30 foot mural of the life of Christ.

I'm looking forward to seeing all of you this coming Holy Week. Remember, bring your scalpels and your tweezers with you. Together we've got a lot of distortions to still uncover; there are so many deeper meanings of our faith and life that we must yet discover. Together we can **TAKE A DEEPER LOOK** at **WHO THIS JESUS IS** and **WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR US ...** and then together we can leave this place and tell the whole world: "Truly, this was the Son of God!" **AMEN.**

PASSION/PALM SUNDAY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
April 4, 1993
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED"

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eli, eli, lema sabachthani," that is, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Matt. 27:25-26

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" These words just don't seem to fit yet today, do they? Words of betrayal, words of conflict & despair, words of forsakenness ... these words are supposed to be reserved for only Good Friday. Call it Palm or Passion Sunday, but on this day we want to avoid passion, conflict and forsakenness. On this day we want words of victory and triumph! On this day we want the jubilation of "Hosannas" not the hostility of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Some of you may be curious as to why we sang "Onward Christian Soldiers" on Passion Sunday. I intentionally chose it, because it truly uplifts our bias as Christians -- we want only upbeat hymns; we want hymns of victory; we want songs which celebrate our courageous ability to be fully in control! We love these old militant hymns which make us out to be triumphant heroes; one member even recently said that he would like to sing this hymn every Sunday (esp. over a few of those dull dirges we sing in Lent!). Yes, "Onward Christian Soldiers" reveals the way we think things should always be: VICTORIOUS, UPBEAT, MILITANTLY STRONG, ALWAYS IN CONTROL, NEVER A DOUBT ABOUT THE OUTCOME!

Obviously, that doesn't apply to hymns only. During the Persian Gulf War and just after it, Pres. George Bush had approval ratings well over 75%. But just two years later, his ratings sunk and he was forsaken as president. And Why? Because he hadn't maintained a PERFECT VICTORIOUS SPIRIT; you only retain power in this world as a militant and pushy winner. Last November 3rd, Bill Clinton succeeded with another victorious popularity! But in only ten weeks in the White House, he has already realized that it is nigh impossible to maintain a victorious presence among fickle spirited followers. One day it's "Hosannas;" the next day it's "Crucify Him!" And that's the way of the world: it will only follow someone who claims to be a perfect winner!

When will we ever learn that the road to victory is not always as easy as Hollywood would make it?! A female church leader recently said that her church has a tradition of marching outside the sanctuary on Palm Sunday waving the palm fronds. But she went on to say: "We never feel that we can really cut loose, because as Paul Harvey says, we know the rest of the story." So everyone holds back at her church on Palm Sunday. She concluded: "I think we all

believe that if we don't get too exuberant with our palm fronds, maybe we can escape the nails on Good Friday!"

There it is in a nutshell! Somehow we have the notion that VICTORY can never come through struggle and sacrifice. Somehow we think that VICTORY only comes when we take the road that everybody else is traveling -- the road of ease, the road of self-indulgence, the road of "getting by with as little as possible," the road of "looking out for only #1." At all costs, we always avoid any road which might cause us to feel alone, to feel forsaken, to feel that TRUE VICTORY might only come through a little self-sacrifice!

Certainly, all of us have known the darkness of forsakenness that came to Jesus during Holy Week. Life becomes dark when the Judas' forsake us. Life becomes even darker when people choose to free and uplift the other guy (Barrabas) instead of us. And life even becomes darker yet when those who are in power wash their hands and won't take a stand ... when they choose the chicken-hearted way, when they conform to the pressures around them, when they let us suffer the consequences of unfair judgments! All of us at one time or another have know that kind of forsakenness.

A few years ago, we celebrated the Year of the Child; but read any report of our children today - children are some of the most forgotten, forsaken, overlooked, betrayed, neglected persons in our whole world. Thousands of kids come home from school every day and have no one to offer support, guidance or assurance. And we wonder why young kids turn to drugs and sex and violence; how could young kids blow away another child and not even seem upset by this fact?!? Maybe it's because they themselves have been forsaken; nobody has taken the time to help them understand the value of life -- so they choose the road of self-pity, the road of alienation, the road of survival, the road of crime, the easy road of self-destruction. Why did Don Brondes choose that road this week?? Why did he allow his unspoken problems to cause him to feel so forsaken?? Why does anyone ever get to the point where he/she feels that "Everyone is against me!/I'm all alone!/Nobody cares/I might as well "drop out"/"give up"/call it quits! Why do so many choose the easy road of defeat ... of giving up??

I'm reminded of a story of a pastor friend. A woman called him and said she was really upset by several problems in the church. He invited her to his office to "unload" freely. He listened carefully, and when she finished he said: "I never realized how much you cared for this church! In fact, I have been looking for someone just like you to oversee two of those problem areas. May I recommend you to the Council to undertake those tasks?!?"

Her reply was immediate and decisive: "Oh, no! I don't want to get involved! I am too busy for things here! But I will certainly be glad to advise you at anytime!"

There is the second nutshell of a dilemma facing not only the church, but the whole world. The world and the church are filled with ADVISORS, but far too few DISCIPLES. As Jesus said, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few!" The road to "giving advice" is the ROAD TRAVELED BY EVERY TOM, DICK, & HARRY EVERY DAY! It's always easy after the basketball defeat to tell the coach how he failed; it's quite another thing to be the coach! It's very easy to advise Jesus on how to resolve the problems of the world; it's quite another thing when he asks for you and me to be his body of sacrifice for the suffering of the world. It's an "easy road" for a committee to authorize a New Directory, or a "Welcome Place" door hanger, or a renovation project, or a Xmas Program or Lenten Series, or a 100% stewardship campaign; it's quite another thing to get all these programs organized, funded, fulfilled and completed when only a small percentage really become the faithful DISCIPLES. Recently, our stewardship committee made follow-up calls on those who have not yet made 1993 commitments; several people actually said "they preferred the optional way - the easy way of making no commitment at all!" And we wonder why we have problems in the world and the church when people define the ministry of Jesus Christ as the "optional or easy way!" The road to giving advice is cheap & always very well traveled; but the way to sacrifice and servanthood is THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED - always filled with the potholes of forsakenness and betrayal.

But Jesus chose this way -- THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED! He chose the way of self-sacrifice and faithful servanthood. Why would he take that road when he knew it would lead to the potential of forsakenness, betrayal, and ultimately death!??

I think the well-known comedian, David Brenner, gives us an insight with his well-known routine about Superman. He would say: "Do you all remember when Superman was confronted by the bad guys? They would shoot at him with their guns and he would stick out his chest and the bullets would bounce away harmlessly. But did you ever notice what would happen next? When the bad guys ran out of bullets, they would throw their guns at Superman. And do you remember what he would do then?? He would DUCK! Bullets bounced off his chest, but he would DUCK when a mere pistol was thrown at him! That's a true insight into the character of the supermans of life: THEY ALWAYS DUCK! But that's never the case for Jesus - He never DUCKED anything thrown at him ... he never DUCKED God's mission for him! Because, that's what faithfulness really means: NEVER DUCKING WHEN YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T BE DEFEATED ANYWAY! Jesus never DUCKED even when he knew he would be forsaken and betrayed. He took THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED - he remained faithful to the will of his Father to the very end! That's the ultimate victory: FAITHFULNESS TO THE FATHER TO THE VERY END! DEATH DID NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD IN JESUS' LIFE!

I don't know about all of you; but I do know one thing is certain for me: I hope SOME ONE will say that same thing about me when I come to the end of my road. I know my life will certainly NOT BE PERFECT! I have and I will continue to fall short of God's glory; I have and I will continue to violate his perfect commandments. I have and I will continue to feel forsaken and betrayed at times. But I hope there is ONE THING that both friends and foes will be able to say about this Christian: HE SOUGHT TO BE FAITHFUL TO GOD'S MISSION EVEN WHEN HE WAS BETRAYED AND FORSAKEN! He was one who was not afraid to take THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED! He didn't DUCK from the will of God. Faithfulness to his Father was the ultimate victory of his life! Death did not have the last word on his life!!

AMEN.

PASSION SUNDAY (PALM SUNDAY)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
March 27, 1994
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"FROM POMP TO PASSION!"

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be gained (exploited), but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave (servant), being born in human likeness. And being in that form, humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross." Phil 2:5ff

Different traditions do different things with Passion Sunday, which we once called Palm Sunday. In past years, we have had processions from Larson Hall and even from the point on Indian Road. One church to this day gathers in the basement beneath its sanctuary every Palm Sunday. The people emerge through a side door and process around the outside of the church singing "Hosannas" and waving palms as they are accompanied by bagpipes and cymbals. (I could do that!)

One year the pastor, Dr. Walter Bruggemann, was leading the procession outside when a man in a nearby apartment threw open the window and shouted: "Cut down on the noise please ... you people are sounding like the Salvation Army!" Dr. Bruggemann looked up and said, "Hey man, come join us ... you can't lose with this army of salvation!"

No doubt about it -- it is very easy for Christians to identify with the "pomp & parades" of Palm Sunday. We all love parties and parades. I must admit - after parading around Hilton Head for 5 days, I can understand how some Christians might define the "abundant life" as a never-ending party of pleasure and parade on 22 golf courses. It's so easy and tempting to make the Christian gospel into a glorious expression of pomp and performance. Many churches today are simply copying the media in order to be successful - giving people a lot of pomp and performance has become their winning marketing strategy! So whether it's shouting "Hosannas" on the streets of Jerusalem ... or shouting "Go Blue" at the NCAA finals at Charlotte ... the great temptation is to make Christianity into just another "song of glory and victory" in our culture.

As one author has said, "It's Easy to Shout; It's Much Harder to Serve!" We've all seen the familiar bumper sticker, "Honk if you love Jesus!" I think the follow-up is much more authentic: "Tithe if you love Jesus; Anyone Can Honk!" Palm Sunday reminds us that one of our greatest temptations is to become "Christian honkers" -- people who just get caught up with the parades and parties and noisy mobs of our faith.

Let's take a closer look at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem to see why the shouts of "Hosanna" so quickly became "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" As you have heard many times - the people of Israel were looking for a "miracle-man-messiah." They

expected a divinely human "messiah" who would bring an end to suffering, poverty and oppression with super-human strength and military might. This vision had become the talk of the towns. And they had heard that this kind of Savior was in the area. In light of what they had been told, with his arrival wealth would be re-distributed, poverty would be something of the past, oppressors would be put down, and every disease and condition of distress would be miraculously terminated. Just imagine the stories that had been circulating around Jerusalem in those days: they had heard that he fed over 5000 at one time; he had given sight to the blind; he healed lepers and those possessed by demons; and he had even raised people from the dead. Now this same "messianic man," Jesus, was coming to their fair city of Jerusalem. Don't you think if we had heard such news we would all be out on the streets shouting our "Hosannas" with the rest of the mob?!?

But then he came, riding on an donkey (that should have been a tremendous clue about the nature of this messiah). This same savior entered this great city ... and as he was riding wept over it ... and then one of his disciples said: "Now let this mind be in you -- that even though Christ Jesus came in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be gained (a lot more realistic than Hinduism which says that we can become the fulfillment of God) but instead he emptied himself ... taking the form of a slave (servant) ... being born in human likeness he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross." Is that the job description that you think the Jews were expecting for their messiah ... a humble messiah who would surrender to death out of love?? In all honesty - how many of us are really comfortable with a resume that has our ultimate vision of God "emptying himself in death?" Just like most of us - the Israelites had an agenda for God -- they were expecting God to enter human civilization and with a mere wave of his hand TO MAKE ALL THINGS PERFECT AND BETTER! Is it any wonder that these ancient peoples expressed anger and betrayal?!? God was not delivering according to the job description that they had conceived for their god. Instead of an all-powerful figure who would rule the world as their benevolent-dictator ... the Israelites got a Messiah who said that "equality with God" is not HIS goal but becoming a servant who is willing to suffer is the greatest exaltation that can be given to god or anyone else on earth!!

After seeing things in this light, maybe we can better understand how the "Hosannas" became "Crucify Him!" Israel wanted Jesus to be the King of the Jews as they understood "kingship" - an all-powerful ruler who would crush others so that they could continue to be spiritual infants. Israel did not want to take responsibility for her own sinful state of affairs. There was only one way that God could show such an arrogant and self-serving people how this world might become a better place of harmony and wholeness: and that was to die for them with the hope that they might be inspired by such an example of sacrificial love.

Every person in this room suffers from the same disease that had infected those ancient Israelites. We want our "messiahs" to come and fix all those things that are wrong and messed up without having to make any sacrifices ourselves. As the saying goes, many of us may "honk" for Jesus but we certainly aren't going to "tithe" for Jesus -- that's just too sacrificial. So we can now see that when our agenda is different from God's - then we stop singing "Hosannas" and start yelling "Crucify Him." That has been the never-ending story in the life of the church for centuries.

As Pastor Silleck prepares to move east to the land of the always-losing Indians, we already know that the people of Reformation Lutheran have "messianic expectations" for their new pastor. We have already heard Pastor Silleck jokingly allude to the fact that he will be senior pastor, bookkeeper, custodian, DCE, administrator, parish visitor, snow-remover, secretary, and a host of other roles that come with the territory of a solo pastorate. On the one hand, we can all laugh with Jeff at that situation. On the other hand, there is reason to be very sober & cautious about such a situation. Having been in that role of solo pastor - I know only too well how "being all things to all people" leads to early heart disease. And even worse, since "pleasing people" is often more important than "loving people" in the church -- the "Hosannas" can quickly become "Crucify Him or Her" for the least little flaw. The church has a tragic history of hostility and crusades and scisms that have kept the bleeding on Golgatha going and going and going. Sometimes that has been the flaw of the people; other times that has been prompted by the church's leaders. But regardless of who stimulates the continuing crucifixion -- and we all have done it -- the cause is too often that religious folk have a bad habit of SEEKING TO COUNT THEMSELVES AS EQUAL WITH GOD.

Much like the soldiers in Mark's gospel today - sometimes we are all tempted to dress up religion in purple robes and taunt ourselves as kings instead of servants. In fact, today with the medium of television, religion is brashly projecting that "kingly" image. TV evangelists are glamorized and dressed in silk suits so that they look and act as if they are Messiahs without fault. And then when their true humanness and imperfection is seen -- then we mock them and shout: "Crucify Him/Crucify Her!" Is it any wonder that Martin Luther urged clergy to simply wear a plain Geneva gown when preaching: HE KNEW THAT LAVISH DRESS OFTEN LEADS TO DIVINE EXPECTATIONS. As Paul makes clear - such expectations are contrary to those who seek to follow Christ Jesus: "for Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be gained, but emptied himself; taking the form of a servant, and became obedient to death on a cross."

Jesus had not come into the world for a "Palm Sunday Parade of Hosannas." He had not entered the realm of life for personal pride and exaltation. He had come for but one purpose: to show God's will of "personal sacrifice" - to serve

rather than be served." He had come to show that man need not stand arrogantly tall to be great, but that the greatest of all are those willing to kneel humbly before their God. Unlike so many human leaders today, Jesus was not above getting down on his knees before God ... he did not regard equality with God as his goal. He had humbled himself before his God for 33 years and that certainly wasn't going to change on Passion Sunday. Here at last was the proper picture of God for all humanity: a God who got down on his knees for all of us, with arms outstretched, imploring us to accept the goodness of his love. That's the proper picture every Passion Sunday.

True ministry is not looking for personal exaltation -- for a place in the sun where you or I can at last get all the glory for ourselves. True ministry is looking for daily opportunities to be OBEDIENT AS A SERVANT OF GOD. Maybe that's why this sermon concludes with the story of Tommy Tighe. Like the ancient Israelites, he had a vision of peace for this world. So he went to a businessman and asked for a loan of \$500. The man agreed, telling Tommy he'd have to return the investment. He told the man that he knew his dream was a risk, but all visions for a better world "are risky." His dream was to produce a bumper sticker that said: "PEACE PLEASE, FOR THE SAKE OF US KIDS," signed Tommy. He printed 1000 bumper stickers with his \$500.

Then he got some "motivational tapes" about marketing -- and he learned that the best marketers "start selling at the top." So he convinced his dad to drive him to former President Ronald Reagan's home. He rang the gatekeeper's bell, and soon he was giving his irresistible presentation to the guard. The guard said, "I'll take one for \$1.50; and hold on, ... I'll get the former President for you."

Tommy was written up in the Orange County Register and appeared on several national television shows. When he was asked if he thought his bumper sticker would bring "peace to the world," he said "he didn't think he was quite old enough yet to really make it work; he thought a nine-yr old would have a better chance at stopping wars." Obviously, he was still a bit naive. But the point of the story is that he had a vision "of not counting himself equal with God, but humbling himself to become one of God's peacemakers in this world. Unlike the ancient Israelites -- he did not expect a Messiah that would wave a magic wand in order to bring peace to the world; he understood that peace would only come if he was willing to take the risk and sacrifice of becoming one of God's peacemaking servants.

You say you want peace, happiness, less stress, more gentleness, and a time of real joy. Then let your mind be in Christ, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be gained, but humbled himself and became obedient to death on a cross. He moved from a position of pomp to a commitment of passion and ever since then at the name of Jesus every faithful knee has bent and every convicted tongue has confessed him as the Messiah of this world. AMEN.

*Palm/Passion Sunday
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo
March 23, 1997
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor*

“TAKING A CLOSER LOOK!”

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, 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. Phil. 2:5-8

We see it every week at Glenwood - Leonardo DaVinci's "Last Supper" at our altar. Most of us never knew it took three years to complete the original. Likewise, I did not know it was painted on the dining room wall of the Monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazia -- and it measured 14 by 30 feet (twice the size of most of our dining rooms).

And just 20 years after DaVinci completed the painting -- it was badly deteriorating. The Italian humid summers, the flooding canals, the icy winters, the fog and pollution--all these caused flaking, fading and blurring of the masterpiece. And in 1656, the monks needed a larger kitchen door to the dining room--so they cut off Jesus' legs. Then in 1796, French troops shot arrows at the apostles; and in 1943, an Allied bomb nearly leveled the building -- but miraculously, the mural was saved because it had been sand bagged.

During the last 500 years -- many attempts have been made to restore the painting -- but most of them have merely added greater distortion. However, for the past 15 years - Dr. Pinin Brombilla has been working with tweezers, scalpels and a magnifying glass to uncover & restore the original. She has made 200,000 sonar readings of the wall to determine cracks, craters and conditions of the wall. Her restoration process has been slow; she has completed a postage stamp-size each day. Talk about a labor of love!!

And you're all wondering -- what does a DaVinci restoration have to do with Palm/Passion Sunday!! Well - it's what we're about every time we gather in this or any place of worship. Christian worship is always a RESTORATION PROJECT -- a restoration of God's love & mercy, of trust and obedience to God and God alone. We come here every week in order that we might TAKE A CLOSER LOOK at what we believe and confess. After all - 2000 years separate us from the life of Christ and the apostolic faith of the Bible. That means we are living with layers upon layers of interpretations, translations, opinions and traditions of the truth! It is our mission each week to MORE CLOSELY restore any distortions in our faith. In fact -- as I said to a young couple who met with me this week -- it takes a lifetime to really know the whole truth -- we must continually ask: WHO IS THIS JESUS?? WHAT DID HE REALLY DO FOR US?? AND WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO FOR HIM??

Each week we come here -- we get another postage stamp glimpse of the truth of the life of Christ. That's why it's tragic that so many people only come a few

times a year -- they can't possibly know the truth of their faith when they only get postage stamp glimpses here & there. And so today - we again take a closer look and ask: WHO IS THIS JESUS? And St. Paul says: *"though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God as something to be grasped ... to be exploited!"* Do you see how this one, little postage-stamp passage already gives us a clearer picture of Jesus Christ?? Did Jesus seek to be "one of the high and mighty" of this world?? Quite to the contrary -- he *"did not count equality with God as something to be grasped!"* Maybe that's why you and I have so much trouble with people who are always **FLAUNTING** their stature, their greatness and their superiority!! It goes against the very essence of what it means to follow the lead of Jesus Christ.

Instead of claiming "equality with God," Jesus went the other way: "He claimed equality with us!" When confronted by the devil -- he didn't seek to be a divine super power; he didn't change the stones into bread, he didn't throw himself down from the pinnacle, he didn't reveal divine glory & power. Jesus Christ wanted each of us to know **THAT HE HAD ALSO KNOWN THE POWER OF TEMPTATION!** He would not become a puppet God for the devil or anyone else. *So he entered Jerusalem on a donkey hearing the shouts of "Hosanna" -- and five days later he departed the city of Jerusalem carrying his own cross and hearing the jeers: "Crucify him!"* For Jesus Christ -- "greatness" is not Godly glory but rather Human servanthood! Jesus became a *"servant, the one who emptied himself for the good of others!"*

So today we take out our tweezers (like Dr. Brombilla) to take a closer look at (1) **WHOM** this Jesus really was! But secondly, we ask: what did he do for us?? St. Paul said to the Philippians: *"He humbled himself and became obedient unto death - even the death of a cross."* 2000 years has a profound way of distorting the real purpose of Jesus' life and ministry. Layers and layers of cultural traditions have sometimes obliterated the most essential expressions of Jesus' life. Too often the church has glorified its own expressions far more than it has glorified the life of Jesus Christ. Too often we get into our own little Sunday morning "praise party" and totally forget to be "obedient servants of Jesus Christ on Monday thru Saturday." And that is especially true as we approach Easter Sunday! Obviously, Christians celebrate spring and the renewal of the earth. But hopefully we see a lot more in Easter than bunnies, egg hunts, tulips, lillies and red-breasted robins.

Jesus did not enter Jerusalem to lead a royal bunny parade; he entered **TO DIE!** And he didn't like this confrontation with death any more than you or me -- that was pretty obvious from his struggle at Gethsemane. But only through his death would humanity learn the meaning of God's dominion over life. Or to put it more personally -- only when I die to myself can God have dominion and control over my life!! That's why we really need to take a **CLOSER LOOK** today. Because the human understanding of **DOMINION** is really exaltation -- dominion for us means having control over others, being the biggest, bragging of the most net worth, or being at the top of the heap! The divine understanding of **DOMINION** is **NOT EXALTATIONS - BUT**

HUMILIATION! "Finding your life by losing it for others!!"

In a small way that was illustrated by a very wealthy doctor to a pastor friend of mine. The doctor was taking my pastor-friend out to dinner. He and his wife picked her up in a Rolls Royce: a deep, dark green Rolls with yellow seats and the overhead lined in lamb's wool. This doctor was known for his tremendous sacrificial spirit in the church; but he was also known to have one of only two Rolls Royces like this one -- the other one owned by Queen Elizabeth. When he picked up the pastor at the hotel, the doorman said: "WoW! Who does this Rolls belong to??" And the faithful doctor answered: "It belongs to my Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ!" The doorman said, "Then who are you??" The doctor answered; "I'm just the driver; that's all I am, just the driver!"

This isn't a perfect illustration of dominion by humiliation -- but it does underscore the reality **THAT WE OWN NOTHING HERE!** We are "but the drivers for God in this world," whether we drive Ford Rover or a Rolls Royce. Like that doctor, Jesus did not come into the world to overwhelm us with his power & glory & stature with God. Instead, Jesus overpowered us by becoming a servant -- by being merciful rather than magnanimous, by being compassionate rather than cocksure, by being obedient even unto death SO THAT WE CAN BE ABSOLUTELY CONFIDENT THAT WE ARE LOVED & FORGIVEN BY GOD! Only dominion by humiliation leads to new life! Dominion by power & force leads to war, to jealousy, to brutality, to fear and to fragmentation! The RISEN CHRIST of Easter Sunday without the HUMILIATED JESUS of Holy Week is a hoax!! There can be no NEW LIFE without first tasting the bitterness of DEATH! There can be no butterfly without death first of the caterpillar.

Passion Sunday takes us deeper and beyond the parade of Hosanas. Today we get closer to the "old rugged cross" where we learn that "might does not make right" in God's kingdom. Again, we take out our tweezers and scrape off another layer of distortion to see a clearer picture of the One whom we have been called to follow.

So, finally, what are we supposed to do ... now that we know we have already been saved by a suffering Lord?? St. Paul says, *"that every knee should bend ... and every tongue confess Jesus Christ as Lord."* I hope we all know what that means. It means that no other person, no other name, no other allegiance, no other relationship, no other thing in all creation should be given more honor or glory than Christ himself! My friends, that's the biggest distortion in the pictures that we have of Jesus and of ourselves. For most of us have allowed all kinds of powers & principalities to cover up and distort the life of Christ ... to say nothing about our own lives. We bow to our bosses, we kneel before the almighty dollar, we kiss the pursuit of sex & pleasure -- and only if we have a little time and energy left over DO WE KNEEL BEFORE THE LORD OUR MAKER and confess Christ as our Savior!!

Here's where we really need to get the tweezers out today and scrape away all the things that have obliterated the prominence of Christ. 2000 years of culture and traditions have allowed us to often cover over and even crowd Jesus out of the real picture of our churches. We have too often learned to name the name of Jesus only when it is convenient ... only when it won't cost us anything ... only when it's to our advantage! In fact, some name the name of Jesus only two times a year -- at Christmas and Easter. Can anyone possibly believe that such a view of God is not a distortion of the truth?!? We can't possibly believe that we really know Jesus Christ when we only have a one-day, postage stamp size view of him.

Thanks be to God that you have all come today with your tweezers TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK at what we believe and are willing to live. For when we leave here today ... or any other day ... we should be able to say: *"Truly, this was the Son of God --- and like Him, I too will humble myself and take up my cross to become a servant of others!"* For that's what it really means to be a part of the Easter parade with the Jesus who died ... and was raised three days later to save us from our own self-exaltation!

AMEN.