

Lent VI
Redeemer Lutheran Church - Milwaukee
4/11/73

"GOING TO GETHSEMANE"

"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

If there is any portion of the Passion Story that we can all identify with, it is undoubtedly the one before us. Figuratively speaking, most of us have GONE TO GETHSEMANE. And very possibly, some of us may be GOING TO GETHSEMANE right now.

In other words, we've all faced dilemmas in which we have said: if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. We can really identify with Jesus' struggle in the garden. And I think if we're really honest with ourselves, we tend to look for the escape hatch to ALL the dilemmas that we face.

Just in rereading the story of Jesus in Gethsemane we should feel some consolation for our natural tendency toward ESCAPISM. If Jesus could be tempted in the direction of escape, then at least we need not feel completely defeated when we are similarly tempted.

The question of course remains: Do we allow the temptation to control us completely? Or do we continue to struggle to transcend the temptation? Jesus' prayer in the garden answers the question for us -- he struggles with his circumstance seeking in the process to remain in harmony with his Father. Ultimately that means that HE DOES NOT chose the route of escape. His prayer becomes an agonizing struggle. *leading to the union with his Father.*

In thinking over my own prayer life, I must admit that I have often made prayer MUCH LESS than an agonizing struggle. Not that it always

has to be -- but there are many times where my prayer -- AND MAYBE YOURS -- is quite content with an easy answer. ~~where God~~ ^{where God} ~~asked~~ ^{asked} to do magic. Where God tells me to do the loving, or the forgiving, or the kindness -- and I say in my prayer-- DO IT FOR ME, GOD!!

So in avoiding the necessary struggle inherent in much prayer -- I really cheat myself. Because when I seek and think that I've found the easy solution, I've really only remained IN LIMBO. In other words, I've remained in my weakened condition. I've not allowed the Holy Spirit to strengthen me THROUGH STRUGGLE.

Let me illustrate. An amateur ^{nature lover} naturalist was observing an emperor moth SLOWLY and VERY LABORIOUSLY making its way from the cocoon stage. Day by day it struggled and squirmed - trying desparately to emerge from the cocoon.

As the naturalist watched this painful LOOKING process, he could almost hear the cry of an unborn babe, "I want to be born, I want to be born!!" So, he decided the only gallant thing to do was to attempt to help this moth in the process of being born.

And so he took his pen knife and ever so carefully he commenced to cut the narrow end of the cocoon so that it would be easier for the moth to be born. He seemed to think that such a harsh struggle in life should be made easier.

Well the moth was obviously born sooner. The conflict was over quickly and the moth emerged into the new strange world. But there was one problem -- a big one. The moth was feeble and frail. . and its wings were not fully developed.

It was unable to cope with its new environment -- and it became a victim of its ground enemies.

nature lover
The ~~naturalist~~ - by what he thought was kindness - had become an enemy of the moth. He had deprived the moth of the strength that comes only BY THE STRUGGLE of being born.

Yes, SO OFTEN the struggle is worth it -- in the long run. And so as Christians, we can take courage from the example of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. We can feel that struggle in prayer life and in life with one another is NOT ONLY O.K. - BUT IS OFTEN VERY NECESSARY.

Jesus encourages us thru his example, not to run away from a probelm or a dilemma, but to FACE IT and struggle to let God's will of love - his will of mercy -- his will of forgiveness -- his will of victory thru eternal life enter into the struggle and help to resovle it. That's our FAITH -- a trust to willingly struggle even when tempted to escape.

My friends, the world badly needs this example of discipleship from we who follow Jesus Christ. And each of us can give this example, because age has nothing to do with A FAITH WHICH SHOWS A WILLINGNESS TO STRUGGLE -- to struggle to let God's will of love ENTER every human situation.

Our world badly needs this prayerful stance from each of us. The world needs this stance because it tends to proclaim today THE WAY OF ESCAPE. Faced with a dilemma, the world tends to tell us to RUN FROM IT.

For ins^unce, if a minority person moves in the neighborhood, the world says-- SELL YOUR HOUSE, AND RUN TO THE SUBURBS. And God's will says: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, sould, mind, & strength, and your neighbor as yourself.

When faced with an unwanted pregnancy today, the world tells us to get rid of it. The world says: DO NOT prayerfully struggle with yourr

dilemma, just abort it. That is not to imply that abortion should NEVER be a possibility. I am sure there are times it is the most loving action. But routine DISPOSAL OF HUMAN LIFE is too often: AS I WILL, NOT AS THOU WILT HAVE ME DO.

When faced with today's criminal problems, the world is telling us that the only route is to GET TOUGH. Yes, the world seems to be telling us that crime and moral decadence are simple matters of black and white -- easily solved by filling our jails. And yet that same world seems to almost tolerate the Watergate Affairs and other white collar corruption.

My friends, I think the world badly needs to prayerfully struggle over its dilemmas -- to prayerfully struggle to bring God's will of mercy and loving-kindness into its family explosions, its marital upheavals, its drug and alcoholic escapism, IN SHORT - to bring God back into the stream of life's struggles.

*instead of
offering
simplistic
solutions*

today we are reminded of

My friends, ~~we have~~ the prayerful struggle of Jesus at Gethsemane. The outcome of that struggle was the courage to face the cross. It did not make the cross an easier reality to face -- but it did make that cross a faithful possibility. And the outcome of that cross was not defeat - failure -- or continued weakness for Jesus or any of us.

The outcome was his victory and ours. Through ~~the~~ cross at Calvary Jesus canceled any I.O.U. that we think we may still owe God. That can only be a victory, because it enables us to even confess TO GOD and TO EACH OTHER our temptation to escape life's struggles.

But in so confessing, God says: You are forgiven. Now take my will of love, mercy and forgiveness, and apply it to your life situation. And what was once a temptation to escape, will

become a courageous willingness to struggle through the dilemma and enjoy the victory of reconciliation -- a new and harmonious relationship with God and he who is your brother or sister, your husband or wife, your son or daughter, yes, your friend or your foe.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou will have me do.

Amen.

The peace of God which
passes all understanding
keep your hearts + minds
in X Jesus. Amen.

PALM SUNDAY

Lutheran Church of the Master - Troy

March 23, 1975

"WHAT A DEMONSTRATION!"

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" Matt 21:9

What a day when Jesus entered the Holy City in triumph. What a day of contrasts! there was frustration and fulfillment; curiosity and conviction; tears and hosannas.

Excitement was running high as it does on any great festive occasion. Many of us have experienced that excitement around here since our organ decision last Sunday. But back to that original triumphant ride.

Here was a strange procession winding its way to the gates of the city. There at the head was a quiet figure - riding along while all about him crowds were gathering. They were curious at first - but soon they were shouting and singing and turning the place upside down for him.

There was a moment when a strange hush fell over the crowd - and those close by said that tears came to his eyes as he looked at the city. But the damper on their spirits lasted only a moment.

Up came the shouts again - Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Everyone grabbed anything they could lay their hands on - branches from the trees, clothing from their backs, and threw it for a carpet in his path. Surely something amazing was about to happen.

What a scene! We think we've seen some wild demonstrations on T.V. these days! Just imagine what this one was like! Remember - this was not a planned parade. Jesus had not obtained a permit for this demonstration. He "borrowed"

a donkey and the colt without asking permission. That alone speaks of a rather strange contrast for this parade -- here comes a king on a donkey! Imagine how strange that must have been to these people - their awaited king on a donkey.

Yes - it was quite a demonstration of great proportions. Here were Jesus' followers - showing no regard for property - simply breaking off branches along the way and carelessly throwing their clothes along the roadway.

How would you and I handle such a jubilant and wild crowd today? Would we join in? Or would we right them off as a bunch of religious fanatics? Can you imagine how the powerful Roman militia felt at that moment? I'll bet they were really tempted to bring some law and order to this unruly crowd.

Yes - my friends - let's get this Palm Sunday procession straight in our heads - this was not a Sunday Kiwanis picnic and parade. It was a growing mob of jubilant - shouting - and quite obviously disorderly people.

And why were they making all this ruckus?!? Because they had been waiting for a religious and political savior -- and now he was in their midst, or so they thought.

And so they shouted -- notice! they did not melodiously sing, THEY SHOUTED - HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID!! And Hosanna, from its Hebrew root, means both - "Save us!" and later came to be used as "Praise" as well. So they were shouting: "Save us Son of David" and "Praise the Son of David"

Here was the multitude, welcoming its Lord . . . and all the time thinking -- he has finally come. Now we will no longer have any problems -- he will take away all oppression -- with one quick stroke he will establish peace FOR US.

Yes, Jesus Christ Superstar is nothing new to

our age - for the Jews on this triumphant day saw Jesus very much in the same way. They shouted "Hosanna" praises because they expected Jesus to save and deliver them from political, social, religious and interpersonal problems of their day.

They expected Jesus to be their instant-cure man.

We must ask ourselves today - as we take their place amidst the multitude singing our hosannas -- do we make Jesus into a instant remedy like an over-the-counter drug? Is that the kind of Savior we worship?

Well - while we're thinking of our separate answers - let us remember that the same jubilant mob that shouted Hosannas turned with a terrible consistency into a sullen, angry mob a few days later, crying "crucify him." That crowd wasn't fickle. It was frighteningly consistent. They expected - and they wanted AN INSTANT CURE SAVIOR. And when he didn't deliver in that fashion - they took care of him!

My dear friends - we do not worship that kind of Savior. We shout Hosanna today - because we worship a savior who empowers us with his compassion - his concern - his love - his forgiveness. That's what our demonstration is about -- it's more than a lot of shouting -- it's making God's power known between people - through people -- yes, in the one by one relationships of love.

This may seem a trite illustration - but it serves the purpose. The Master had a problem -- his organ would no longer serve the congregation. We prayed for a solution -- and God answered this prayer the way he has always shown us -- that it will take a sacrificial commitment ONE BY ONE of his people at the Master to solve the dilemma. He offered no instant cure -- it meant sacrifice - it meant suffering -- it meant taking a risk -- it meant living our faith rather than simply talking about it!

Yes - that's why we shout our Hosannæ today - because God has empowered us ONE BY ONE to accomplish his mission in the world -- whether it be an organ or a condition of misery in a neighborin church. And he expects both of these to be on our prayer list - our priority list - and our commitment list!

When men asked Jesus "What must a man do to be saved?" - they were asking, What must the world do to be saved from the mess it's in right now?

Jesus replied: Keep the laws of God: Love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself.

And so they responded: Yes, Lord, we know all about that, but get to the point. So Jesus illustrated the point with a simple story of a kindly traveler.

They didn't get the point because loving God and one's neighbor is often a slow, roundabout business. And these people felt: surely God must have a more concrete and direct answer than that!

And then one morning these same people saw Jesus entering the Holy City exactly as the prophets said.

Before you knew it, they were pounding each other on the back and shouting hosanna and pulling branches from the trees and cloaks from their backs.

The day had finally come. No more of this slow, roundabout business of painfully loving one neighbor after the other until kingcome come. Today he would give them God's big and dramatic answer to the big and ugly problems of their world. And the answer he gave them?? A Cross!

And it still is that way. You and I are in that crowd TOO OFTEN wishing desperately that God would step in and provide an easy, simple, dramatic answer for us and our world. But he won't. He has too much respect for us.

Way back at the beginning of things God took man into partnership and gave him dominion over all of this created world. He will not go back on that.

But he will and does show us the way of creative obedience and suffering. And we get a glimpse of this every time we worship together. And if you and I respond in love and trust, it will be because a man rode into Jerusalem one day, not to set himself upon a throne, but to enthrone his cross in the hearts of people like you and me.

Yes, that's why we sing hosannas today. Because God has empowered us with the desire to love him and our neighbor as ourselves -- even when it costs us suffering, sacrifice, and a piece of worldly security.

This may be the slow, roundabout way to worldly peace -- but that's our style of DEMONSTRATION -- we believe and can demonstrate that the world is saved through the slow, sometimes roundabout, often sacrificial love of Christ.

And for that belief - we may be spit upon, we may be mocked, we may be laughed at -- we may even suffer persecution! But like our Lord, we will continue to ride on in the majesty of sacrificial love of God and neighbor. Because we are committed to his path and his power.

So - let us sing Hosannas - and then get on with the real sacrificial business of being Christ to each other!

Amen

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

PALM SUNDAY
Luth Church of the Master, Troy
April 3, 1977

"THE FINAL DAYS"

"God bless the king who comes in the name of
the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory to God!"
Luke 19:38

The FINAL DAYS of Jesus' earthly ministry
are greeted with a great parade. That seems
quite fitting for the final days of any great
leader. Nothing like a good farewell party.
A little wip-dee-do, a lot of back-slapping,
and some good old boisterous cheers for the
great guy.

Of course, there's only one small hitch in
the case of Jesus of Nazareth. Nobody but
Jesus knew that these were HIS FINAL DAYS.
In fact, most of the people on that parade
route WERE JUBILANT because this was there
inauguration celebration -- the king had
finally come.

Soon their LOUD HOSANNAS would be even
louder CRUCIFY HIM. Rather strange treatment
for a king - a rather short term of office.
But these were THE FINAL DAYS for King Jesus!

It's an interesting study to see how humanity
faces her FINAL DAYS. There are so many FINAL
DAYS in the lifetime of every human being.

There's the FINAL DAYS of the bottle; the
FINAL DAYS of carefree childhood; the FINAL
DAYS of another year of school or of college;
the FINAL DAYS of living at home; sometimes
the final days of a marriage or courtship;
the FINAL DAYS of an illness; the Final Days
of a job or before retirement; and, yes,
the FINAL DAYS of life itself.

How do you and I handle THESE FINAL DAYS
events? Normally, there's some sadness

associated with it. Probably tears, maybe even insecurity. Sometimes there's even anger and bitterness.

Often with the final days of death or a major life change, there can even be outrage and blasphemy -- a striking out at God, at other people, at anything sacred in life.

Let's face it -- most of us don't like to face THE FINAL DAYS. And if we've brought these days on by our own stupidity or sin, we often try harder to evade our responsibility for them that much more. Final days are tough enough -- but even worse when we've brought them upon ourselves.

But here comes Jesus Riding on to face his final days. And even though we don't have Woodward and Bernstein to report the incidents of the final days -- we do have an authentic report of that last week. And one thing stands out clearly -- Jesus was the same Lord during THE FINAL DAYS that he had been during his previous three years of ministry.

Those days again see Jesus gathering with his disciples for the Passover meal. But at that Last Supper, he doesn't ask for special tribute or honor. He doesn't plead for syrupy sympathy. He doesn't play on the emotions of his followers -- nor does he blame his close associates for his impending doom. He doesn't even slander or point an accusing finger at the guilty one at the Table.

Instead when his disciples badger him to talk about greatness and to name the greatest among them -- he tells them that the greatest is the least, that is, the one who serves the others. And with that, he girds his loins and washes their feet.

Moreover -- there is no cover-up for the past failures -- and no cover-up of the future trials.

Where the disciples had failed in the past -- there was no need for denial or coverup. There was forgiveness and freedom from those shortcomings -- and the institution of the Lord's Supper was the eternal seal upon that.

Likewise, no cover-up of the future. Jesus laid all the cards on the table. He let the disciples know that the trials of the past would be nothing compared to the privation and persecution of the future. There would be no easy road as a Christian.

And of course, the Final Days also show us Jesus in the garden. Here we encounter real human fear -- here we encounter a king who does not hide his human weakness, but let's us know that he's real. Here we do not have a Lord who hides his agony behind arrogance and pompous power -- but a king who can openly confess that he'd just as soon not go through the ordeal.

But likewise, a King who finally submits to divine will, rather than letting his frail human will take charge. His disciples are ready to do battle for Him -- but he does not foster such bloodshed.

And then there are the confrontations with Pilate, and Herod, and the mob, and the criminals and the soldiers. All golden opportunities for Jesus to let the world have it -- to really ream 'em out -- to give them hell, fire, and brimstone.

But none of that in these final days. Instead we hear a calm affirmation of kingship, we hear one agonizing cry, we hear "today you shall be with me in paradise," and "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Hardly what one could call damning words or accusations. Instead we encounter humility and compassion for a brother and mother. Instead of claiming to be a super-star with magic acts, we see a man and king who with

great dignity resigns himself CONFIDENTLY for death.

Yes, this is the day of Jesus' triumphant entry toward THE FINAL DAYS. Is it any wonder after viewing his FINAL DAYS that we can still shout: "God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory to God!!"

We don't say this because POWER has won. Or because might has made right. During his FINAL DAYS just like all his other days, Jesus was not trying to impress the world with size, muscles, weapons, money, and status. In his final days he impressed the world with the same sign as his first days: HE BECAME LEAST AMONG THEM.

That's why we sing JOY TO THE WORLD today -- because we are not only joyful at Christmas that our Lord has come, our Lord has gone. We make a mockery out of our king the way we straight jacket him with our hymns and pious moods.

We are joyful and jubilant even as we look to the FINAL DAYS of Jesus earthly ministry. Because the cross is not the last word, but the first word. Yes, the cross is our gateway to God, and the supporting beams for each other: He who loses his life will find it.

So contrary to so many circumstances of life, we can face THE FINAL DAYS of Jesus with confidence and JOY. Not because Jesus is bigger and better than all other gods. But quite the opposite. For our sakes, he made himself nothing - in order that we might have everything. And so we shout: "God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory to God!"

AMEN

PALM SUNDAY (The Sunday of the Passion)
Luth Church of the Master, Troy
4-11-76

"THE PARADOX OF THE PASSION"

The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had: He always had the very nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God. Instead, of his own free will he gave it all up, and took the nature of a servant. He became like man, and appeared in human likeness."
Phil. 2:5-7

What a day of double meaning! Palm Sunday and the Sunday of the Passion. Christ enters Jerusalem in majesty, honor, praise and with shouts of hosannas -- yet, what double meaning that day - that entry and its expectations really have.

The people expect a new king -- and they're getting one. For them, this means an end of political chaos -- it means the beginning of a new order in the worldly scene.

But the paradox of it all -- for this King - this Jesus of Nazareth -- this divine man who appeared in human likeness challenged that political establishment to its very core. He came to re-order its priorities -- and that was a little deeper rooted than most politicians wanted.

Yes - a double meaning day. The people cried out "HOSanna" meaning "Praise, and Save Us." They were praising this king because they expected him to SAVE THEM -- to Save Them from political and economic ruin.

But this Christ had not come to be their leading economist or detent advisor. He had come to rule their hearts and minds. Is it any wonder that "HOSANNA" soon became "CRUCIFY HIM"

And again, more double meaning. The people accepted this new king on this entry day. But he better shape up to their agenda -- He had better rule they way they wanted him to. Essentially, they wanted a war-monger, and essentially they got a peace-lover.

Is it any wonder that Palm Sunday ACCEPTANCE soon became PASSION WEEK rejection!

Yes - double meaning day. The people expected this New Messiah to offer them INSTANT REMEDIES to age old problems. But this new Messiah, like his age-old Father, expected these people TO USE his power of love to remedy whatever was ailing them.

And we all know, the power of love is not always an instant cure but a gradual healing. Is it any wonder then that Jesus Christ the King was mobbed on Palm Sunday but deserted even by his closest followers on Good Friday.

Yes - Palm Sunday. A day of double meaning. A day when we see the paradoxes of the passion quite clearly. A day when we see that WHAT WE WANT is not always WHAT GOD GIVES. A day that we see that God gives WHAT WE NEED, which can be the paradox - the opposite - from what WE WANT.

And that brings us to the double meaning of right now. We must ask ourselves - what are we here for? Why have we come to shout our Hosannas today? What is our relationship to the crucified and risen king on this Palm Sunday?

Are we like many in the crowd that first Palm Sunday - just followers of the crowd -- just curiosity seekers? I'm told that Palm Sunday across the country is often more popularly attended than Easter. It seems that things haven't changed too much from that first Palm Sunday -- still a lot of people who only want Christ as king BY THEIR RULES, and not his.

But I'm more than confident that the majority here are more loyal subjects than Palm Sunday onlookers. And I'm grateful for that.

Yet -~~Like~~ like the rest of humanity - we are also gullible. Our motives and expectations are not always clear. So what is the DOUBLE MEANING for us in our Palm Sunday presence?

What's behind our Hosannas? Do we expect Christ to be our political ambassador? Does allegiance with Christ mean that we are to be #1 superior power in the world? Do we make our Lord and Savior into a military strategist? Do we think that by following Christ all of our problems will be instantly solved?

These were the meanings given Christ on that first Palm Sunday.

Hopefully - these aren't the motivations for our presence at this Palm Sunday parade. Hopefully - we see a new double meaning for being here today.

We live on the resurrection side of the cross. So we have the benefit of a meaning of Palm Sunday that the first crowd did not have. The Hosannas of that day have become confirmed for us. No longer is "Save Us" a wishful need -- it has been and will be forever a reality -- the passion of Christ has confirmed that.

We may not be saved from political ruin, or from economic ruin, or from disaster, failure, or sickness -- including death -- but we will and have been saved from a meaningless future and destination. Thru Christ's love, God has given us a gift that can't be taken away.

And that's worth a lot of Hosannas. But that's only one-side of Palm Sunday's double meaning.

The other side is our response - our imitation of Christ's life. And that's summarized for us by Paul in today's text:

Yes -- the Palm Sunday parade is a gathering of people who have responded TO THE DOUBLE MEANING OF CHRIST'S passion.

They are people who have accepted God's gracious gift of love in Christ -- they are God's chosen and saved ones -- but they have also accepted God's gracious demand - they have, like their Lord, willingly taken on the nature of servants.

As they have received the gift of grace, so they offer it -- not begrudgingly, but with shouts of praise -- singing - Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

AMEN

6th Weds. in Lent
Luth Church of the Master, Troy
April 4, 1979

"THAT'S AS CLOSE AS YOU CAN GET!"

Have you even seen two, true lovers sitting at opposite ends of the sofa?? Let's face it -- if they're young, warm-blooded Americans, they're probably as close to each other as they can get. And what else could we expect!!? It's for a very normal desire for those in love TO GET AS CLOSE TO EACH OTHER AS THEY POSSIBLY CAN.

And this very same dimension is a reality as you and I receive Holy Communion. Through Jesus' own words - we are commanded to eat and drink of these elements - to take them into our bodies.

Although biologically - the elements remain bread and wine, spiritually they are Jesus' body and blood. In short, Jesus comes into us through these physical elements.

Or to put it another way - Jesus wants to completely identify with us - to be one with us. He wants to crawl under our skins - to become part and parcel with us. To empower our bodies with his power.

This means the Lord's Supper is not only the Christian's highest privilege on earth -- it is the closest that you and I can get to God ON THIS SIDE OF HEAVEN. Through the body and blood of the Sacrament on the Altar, Jesus comes closer to us than at any other time ... or in any other way on earth. In receiving a fragment of bread -- a small sip of wine ... we become united in a mystical union with God.

That is why the Holy Communion should have and does have such significance in our Christian tradition. Because by Christ's designation -- in Holy Communion this IS AN CLOSE AS WE CAN GET to God.

I would only further give two brief applications of this to our Christian life.

First, you hear a lot of talk today about the gifts of the Spirit. It has especially become fashionable among some Christians to claim that certain gifts of the Spirit put them closer to God than other Christians.

Well - let us be crystal clear that there is only one gift of the Spirit THAT PUTS US ALL EQUALLY CLOSE TO GOD ... and that is the gift that he himself designed for all believers ... the gift of Jesus Christ in the body and blood of the Lord's Supper.

Every other gift of the Spirit has the potential to put the emphasis upon humanity rather than God. But you see - we can't take the credit for the sacrament. That is the one gift that God has given TO PUT US ALL EQUALLY CLOSE TO HIM. And therefore, as Christians, this is really the only gift of the Spirit that is ESSENTIAL ... and that is commanded by God himself.

Secondly - as was clear from John's gospel, Jesus identifies himself as the bread of life ... his mission was to GIVE HIMSELF for our sake, that is, for the sake of the world.

Let us remember that we don't TAKE this nourishing love from Christ JUST to become fat and sleek ... we take it, in order that we may give it to others.

Christ gets as close to us AS HE CAN GET in Holy Communion ... thereby giving us HIS example, in order that we might get as close to each other and those needing his nourishment all around us.

AMEN

PALM SUNDAY-PASSION SUNDAY

April 8, 1979

Lutheran Church of the Master, Troy

"CROWN HIM THE LORD OF ALL"

"The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had: He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God. Instead, of his own free will, he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant." Phil 2:5-7

(RSV. "Have a mind among yourselves like that of Christ Jesus.") 2:5

At first, it was nothing more than a rumor. Then it became idle gossip. Then it became more than idle gossip. And finally this carpenter's son from an obscure village called Nazareth was causing a stir among those whom he came in contact with. He preached new teachings. He performed miracles. He spoke with uncanny authority. And yet - he was scoffed at by all the religious authorities of the day. He just didn't fit the Messiah's mold.

His royalty was obscured. His birthplace was not the palace of Jerusalem. It was not even a good hotel in the city of David. There just was no room for this one. He had been born in a stable - wrapped in inexpensive cloth-- and laid in a manger. Surely no one in his right mind could call this one a King.

His home was hardly a castle. We are even told that many times he had no place to lay his head. His diet was hardly that of the wealthy. His clothing was cheaply inexpensive. He had no bodyguards. Let's face it ... he just didn't meet the external requirements for lordship... he wasn't born and didn't live like a King.

But not so his manner with mankind. He may not have had the right background ... he may have lacked the proper accrudiments ... but when he

spoke, when he related to others ... there was authority as of only from God. He spoke as one having authority. Or as Paul says in our text today - he had the very nature of God. Yet, even with that very nature - he did not try to become equal with God, but instead, took upon himself the nature of a servant.

In essence - Paul is saying that Jesus emptied himself of his militant or super power, yet retained the spiritual or mental power of God. He became fully human -- yet retained a divine mentality in his role and relationship to humanity. And it's because of this spiritual hook-up with God which Jesus retained.. even in the midst of suffering ... that we shout today: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

It is that spiritual oneness with God that allowed Jesus to go to the Garden of Gethsemane and finally be willing to accept the cup of sacrifice. We know only too clearly from Jesus' prayer THAT HUMANLY SPEAKING he did not want to drink the cup of sacrifice. But because he was spiritual one with the Father - he finally accepted the sacrificial cup. He accepted the CROWN OF SACRIFICE.

And when it came time to drink the cup ... he walked to meet his captors BECAUSE HE WAS ONE WITH THE FATHER. They did not have to catch him, capture and arrest him. He went to meet his persecutors -- because he was spiritually one with his Father. He knew his Father's will had to be done. He accepted the CROWN OF PEACE ... THE CROWN OF NON-VIOLENCE.

And as the soldiers prepared him for crucifixion - he was crowned with thorns. And he was humiliated and mocked -- laughingly called the "King of the Jews." But even as much as this physical ridicule and torture hurt him, he was spiritually one with the Father: And so he said to them with authority:

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Instead of returning injury with further insult - he accepted the CROWN OF RECONCILIATION.

And for these reasons and many others, we not only shout HOSANA today, but every time we gather in his name. Not because he was physically the most mauchó man that ever lived, but because he was and still is the only man WHO BECAME ONE WITH THE FATHER ON EARTH. He is the only one who has ever reigned as a true king of kings, and lord of lords. Because to this very day he ~~IS~~ IS ~~still~~ the one WHO RULES THE LIVES of millions scattered throughout the world *by the power of His Father.*

And his rule today is no different than when he walked the earth. He does not force his rule upon us. He does not badger us into becoming believers. His power of sacrificial love ... of forgiving peace ... of eternal reconciliation with God and all people ... he offers all these just to rescue us from the silly and sometimes suicidal circumstances that we get ourselves into.

Yes - he has rescued us from the pit of eternal nothingness. He has given us eternal life with God. And NOW he calls us to be spiritually one with God as he was SPIRITUALLY ONE during his ministry on earth.

He calls to let God rule in our hearts the way Christ allowed God to rule in his heart. In short, he calls us to take upon ourselves the cup of servanthood that he took upon himself.

What does that mean in specifics. It means many things, but let me just suggest a few. It means that when God calls us to ~~drink~~ the cup of sacrifice -- that the least we will do

is to really struggle in prayer with God's will for us. The Garden of Gethsemane was no easy struggle for Jesus; doing the will of God should be no easier for us today. It is always a struggle to give up the securities of life ... or to take on new risks of ministry. But such is the crown of life for a Christian.

Likewise ... Christ calls us to face ~~our~~ persecutors with the CROWN OF PEACE ... to put on the mind of God. By our own nature - when we are faced with a little persecution OUR NORMAL TENDENCY IS TO WANT TO QUIT -- TO GIVE UP ON OURSELVES AND GOD! Even in the life of the church - sometimes we can get into little squabbles which can tempt us to run away from God -- to give up -- to quit being one of God's servants. And yet we must remember - that Jesus the Christ rules our hearts -- and he calls us to wear the CROWN OF PEACE, even after we've been miffed!

+ Humility

Finally - in specifics - Christ calls us to wear the crown of reconciliation. There is no way to live life outside of the arena of ridicule...slander... and humiliation. As long as we live, we will be tortured, and we will torture one another with those realities. But because we are spiritually one with the Father -- we will not allow those things to be victorious in our lives. Like our Lord, we will finally say to God and each other: "Father, forgive them, forgive me, for far too often we don't do the things that we know we should do." And when we say this - God our Father will give us, just like he gave his Son, Jesus Christ, the Crown of all Crowns, the crown of reconciliation & resurrection.

And then with all the throngs of the past... and those yet to come ... we will sing, "CROWN HIM THE LORD OF ALL ... Hosana .., Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

AMEN

PALM SUNDAY/SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

March 27, 1983

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE?"

"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 human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of a cross.

Phil 2:5-6

An old seminary friend of mine by the name of Leroy from Indiana told a classic story about an old school friend of his. This school friend was a farm boy in Indiana and he was sort of the daredevil type. He had erected a couple of upright poles out in his cornfield, and strung wire across them. That summer this old Indiana farm boy decided he was going to learn how to walk the high wire -- just for the challenge of it.

And so he practiced... and practiced... He got out there every evening after chores and little by little, he finally learned how to do it. And it wasn't too long and this farm boy was learning how to do it with a long pole, with wheelbarrows, and with all kinds of other props. He even started to juggle on the high wire.

Well, word got around about /this farm boy from Indiana. And he started to get offers from all over the place. Couple of different circuses even approached him and wanted him to sign up as their high-wire act. But he wasn't interested. He was more the Evil-Knievil type -- he wanted to go for the ultimate challenge -- none of this side show stuff!

Well, he was practicing one day out in his cornfield and this agent came up to him and said: "Boy! I've got such a deal for you ... you just can't resist! We want you to walk across Niagara Falls with just your wheel barrow. We've contracted with a couple of the major TV networks, we'll have national Saturday afternoon coverage, and we've got backers and there's a lot of money in it for you. So, what do you say, we'll you do it?!?"

Well, Leroy's friend's eyes lighted up as he said: "AHA!! this is the challenged I've been waiting for. I will do it!! And he turned to Leroy and asked: "Hey, Leroy, how about coming along for a little moral support??" And Leroy answered, "Sure, why not! What else does an Indiana college student have to do on a warm Saturday afternoon?!"

So they went to Niagara Falls. And the wire was stretched across the Falls ... and the cameras were there. Now it was one of those warm blustery summer days and the water was pouring and swirling down over the falls and the wind was whipping back and forth over those falls ... and Leroy's farm-boy started to have some second thoughts.

He tested the wire ... nice and tight. So he went out a few feet, and then came right back. He looked at Leroy and said: "You really think I can do this?!? And Leroy said, "Sure!!! I've seen you do it hundreds of times! I've seen worse wind than this come ripping across those Indiana cornfields. No problem! I know you can do it!!"

So the farm-boy friend went back out again. THIS time he went out about 30 feet .. then he turned his wheel-barrow around and came hustling back again. He signed to Leroy: "Leroy, I'm not sure -- I've never been scared like this before. This really has me a little nervous... Do you really believe I can do this??"

And Leroy answered: "Yes, yes yes! I believe you can do it. Just go and do it, and it will be over before you even know it!"

So Leroy's friend readied himself again. And out he went over the falls -- the wheelbarrow teetering in the wind before him. This time he went all the way to the middle -- then he came scampering back. With deep breaths he said: "Leroy, I just don't think I can make it!"

Leroy was starting to get exasperated. He retorted: "I know you can do it. You were almost half way there. Now turn around and get out there and show the world that you have what it takes!!"

So, again the farm friend began his trek across. He passed the middle mark ... then made it past the two thirds point -- he was in the home stretch -- only 20% to go, when

stopped dead still, teetered back and forth for a moment, and then began to retreat all the way back to Leroy! He got to Leroy's side, breathing very heavy, and again saying: "Nope! I'm afraid this one is too much. I don't think I can do it!!"

Leroy could not hold back his total exasperation. "You were almost all the way! You only had forty-fifty feet to go! Why did you come back?!? You almost made it. Now turn around and go all they WAY THIS TIME!! I know you can do it. I have complete faith in you; I know you're the best... you just go out there and show the world!! I believe in you... you will do it!!"

There was a long and tense pause. Leroy's farm boy friend looked out at the long wire; then he looked at his wheelbarrow; then he looked at his friend, Leroy! Finally, after a long silence -- he said: O.K. Leroy, I'll do it! But first, GET IN! Yes, you get in the wheelbarrow!"

Palm Sunday ... Passion Sunday ... Maundy Thursday ... Good Friday ... Holy Week -- all these times are so easy when we stand on the sidelines yelling to Jesus: "You can do it!! Just get out there and do it, Jesus. We believe in you."

It's so easy when all you have to do is yell with the crowd: "Hosana..Hosana...Hosana! And next week the crowd will even be much larger -- more than double the size of this week's crowd -- and that crowd will be saying: "Allelulia, Allelulia, alleluia!" It's so easy to cheer from the sidelines when you don't have to pay the price!! It's so easy to believe when there's no risk and no cost involved!

For Jesus Christ -- facing Palm Sunday was very much like Leroy's friend facing the high wire over Niagara Falls. All the hooting and hollering and hosanas from the crowds were just echoing impulses of the difficulties ahead! This was the moment of reminder for Jesus that there was no turning back -- he must now be ready to lose his life! Obedience is no longer just words -- religious platitudes -- IT NOW MEANS A WILLINGNESS TO DIE!!

What does Palm Sunday... the Sunday of the Passion ... the week called Holy Week -- what do these moments mean for you and me?? Are they times where we really come to know the depth of God's love and sacrifice for us?? Or are they just part of our religious routine -- where we go on telling Jesus how much we believe in him, but never see the personal application of that belief to our own lives.

Like my friend, Leroy, it's so easy to tell God or anyone else how much we believe in him(them) as long as belief doesn't require any personal sacrifices! Leroy had it made as long as he could convey his faith in his /friend in just words. But when his friend said: "Get IN!" -- all of a sudden Leroy had to live by that faith -- not only talk about it!

That's what Palm Sunday and Holy Week are all about. Helping us to see that we have a God who gives us more than words ... more than religious platitudes! We have a God who goes all the way for us -- who humbles himself and becomes obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! No greater love can be given than to lay down your life for those you love!

But Palm Sunday and Holy Week not only show us the grace of God through the obedience of Jesus. They are the days which urge us to examine our own faithfulness ... our own discipleship. They are the days which ask not only Jesus, but each of us: Are you really willing to pay the price?? Or is your faith just like Leroy's words that have not yet been tested by deeds.

On this Sunday of the Passion -- Jesus says to all of us:
"GET IN!" Start taking some of the risks of discipleship!
"GET IN!" Enough encouragement from the sidelines ... now show me that your faith is one which is willing to sacrifice!
"GET IN!" Become obedient with more than easy words and crowd pleasing slogans!
"GET IN!" Become obedient unto death -- not your physical death, but become obedient to the death of the ugly, mean, selfish, and arrogant part of our nature -- die to the old Adam, that we might live with Christ!

The value of Passion Sunday ... and Holy Week ... is that we might get beyond where Leroy was -- the sidelines of

discipleship! Holy Week is our opportunity to "get in" with Christ -- to die to self so that we might rise with Christ as a new person on Easter. Without Holy Week -- Easter is nothing but bunnies, eggs, flowers and new clothing. Our Easter shouts of "Alleluia" become empty words of religious hypocrisy!

To believe in Christ -- to tell Jesus, "I believe in you...you can do it" means also that you and I are always willing to pay the price that goes with belief! Jesus says, "Get IN. Go all the way with me ... and you will know the joy and fulfillment of Easter not only in heaven ... but on earth as well.

AMEN