

HOSANNA — THE CRY OF OUR HEARTS

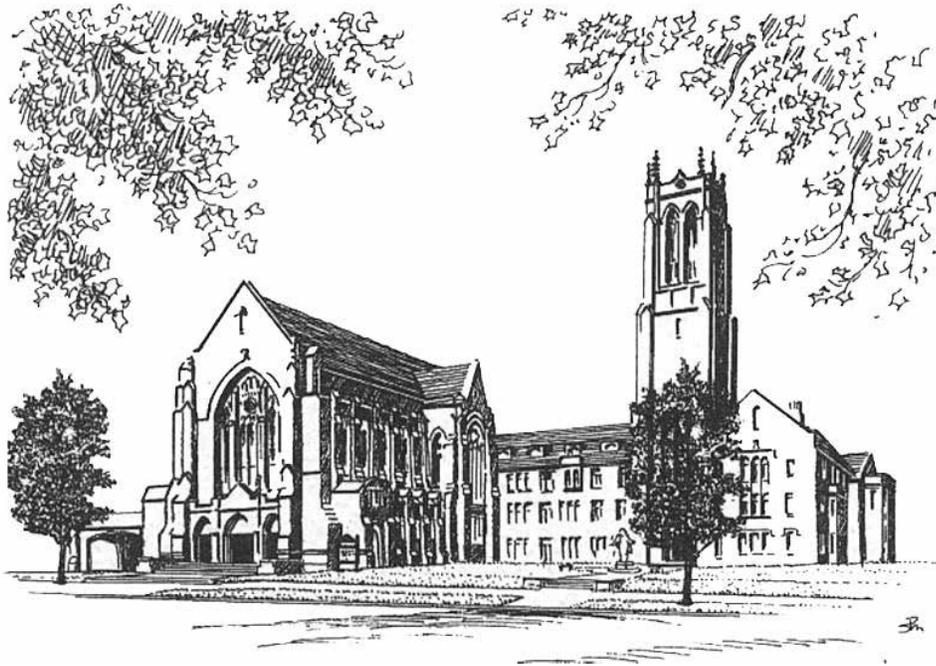
by

Rev. Thomas A. (Tommy) Williams

April 13, 2014

Palm Sunday

8:30 and 11:05 a.m.



ST. PAUL'S

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Texts:

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; and Matthew 21:1-11

Isaiah 50:4-9a

⁴*The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens — wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.* ⁵*The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward.* ⁶*I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.* ⁷*The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame;* ⁸*he who vindicates me is near.*

Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together.

Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me.

⁹*It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.*

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

¹*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!*

²*Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."*

¹⁹*Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.*

²⁰*This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.*

²¹*I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.*

²²*The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*

²³*This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.*

²⁴*This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

²⁵*Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!*

²⁶*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.*

²⁷The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

²⁹O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 21:1-11

¹When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.”

⁴This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, ⁵“Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the

trees and spread them on the road.⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"

¹¹The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

The gathering place was a kind of Cathedral with seats all around and a huge sanctuary in the center. Unlike other Cathedrals, however, this one had no roof and no heat, but even inclement weather failed to dampen the spirits of the worshipers. It was Sunday, the day for coming together. By the time of the opening hymn, 50,000 were in attendance. The High Priests and their assistants were assembled in the sanctuary wearing their bright-colored vestments. A hush came over the congregation as the ritual began, and then cheers of praise as it progressed. Here and there choirs were leading portions of the congregation in various chants. The offering that day was over \$400,000, all given by happy and willing hearts. The children were awed and sought opportunities to touch the garments of the priests as though they were gods, and in their minds prayed that some day they too might be elevated to such high office. Here and there were booths selling religious articles, statues, pennants, bumper stickers, and books on the lives of the recognized saints.

It was wonderful.

It was exciting. It was inspirational.

It was a Houston Texans football game.

Crowds gather for all sorts of occasions, with all kinds of loyalties and interests and passions. During Passover week crowds gathered all over Jerusalem with all kinds of loyalties and interests and passions.

Ahead *and* in front of Jesus were the crowds on the first palm day. The disciples have retrieved a donkey and a baby colt for Jesus. Matthew is the only

Gospel that says there were two. Mom and baby, just as the prophet Zechariah said would be. Both are symbolic – a foal is a baby donkey, one that had never been ridden, a symbol maybe that even the young can be of service to the Messiah. A donkey was an animal of peace, not of war. Their cloaks were common, spread along the way so that Jesus of Nazareth would have a smoother ride. Their cloaks likely got dirty, but who would care this day, for the long-awaited Messiah was riding in to town on the beginning of this Passover week!

All the hopes and dreams of this large crowd, all their aspirations as a people were riding on that donkey. Political conquest, freedom from Roman oppression, the triumph of the commoner over the powers that be was riding in to town on that peaceful animal.

All of this was especially significant because meanwhile on the other side of Jerusalem another large crowd was gathering. Historians tell us that on the beginning of Passover Week every year, the Roman rulers, occupiers of Jerusalem at this time, would ride in on stallions, horses of war. They would come dressed in their regal clothing...a show of force, a reminder of who was in charge. All as if to say to the large masses of faithful Jews who had journeyed to the city — don't forget, you are not in control, we are!

Two large crowds. No doubt the Romans had a crowd of cheerleaders, too! Maybe this crowd was cheering out of fear. Maybe they were intimidated. Maybe they had benefited from the Roman occupiers financially. Who knows, but what's clear is there were large crowds to join everywhere.

Which crowd will you join?

Which crowd will you be a part of?

Lord knows there are many types of crowds we can join today. We could sit in the football audience and participate in that game, which has all the trappings of worship and adoration! (I love football, but I'm just saying!)

There is not a shortage of causes to join, crowds to join, people to follow. Some are worth it, some are probably harmless, some are destructive.

You've made a particular choice today! To be gathered up in a crowd in this place with these people, worshipping the Prince of Peace who rode in on a donkey!

You made a choice today to do something that is out of the ordinary, to wave branches in a building and sing and praise God. We sing "Hosanna" because it is the cry of our hearts and our world, it means **Save Us** because somewhere deep inside, we know we need it!

"Hosanna" is the cry of our hearts. Hosanna, as the Psalm, said means "Save us Lord, we ask you!" The Greek meaning is "to cry out." All we have to do is look around and look within and see that something is wrong, we need saving.

Children ought not go to bed hungry at night. Marriages ought to be places of safety and love, no one should be enslaved to another person. No matter who one feels about immigration laws and reforms, families should have an opportunity to stay together and not be torn apart.

Hosanna, Save us Lord!

First century Jerusalem was unfortunately no different. King Jesus rode in to busy Jerusalem streets full of travelers from all around for the Passover festival. The occupying Roman authorities used it as that occasion for a show of might, crackdown, and oppression in the streets, no doubt. The people gathered around Jesus because they knew at some level they needed to be saved, and they have this hope that Jesus is the One to do it. That is our hope and belief, too. To be saved, to be rescued is the cry of our hearts.

We don't walk this journey alone. The psalmist's cry reminds us that we cry together, we shout and praise and sing together.

Save us! Your sin is not just *your* sin; we are caught up in the devilish brokenness of humanity. We together need to be saved. None of us is whole until all of us are whole.

People for centuries have been crying hosanna, save **us** Jesus, and today all around the globe people cry out the same.

It wouldn't take long. Crowds turn on football teams. They may start the way I described, but they can turn quickly, and this crowd turned on Jesus. Soon.

Crowds are fickle. Watch the supporters of any professional sports franchise, and you will see. When the team is winning the stadiums are full, when the team hits a losing streak, the gate monies diminish.

Be they political supporters, pop idol followers, or sports fans — crowds are at their best when they are cheering on a winner.

I have some understanding for the fickle crowd. Forgive me, forgive us, Lord, save us from us. I have felt the crowd's vacillation in my own heart.

But He came. He comes. Jesus comes.

God loves this world and you and me too much to leave it like it is. And so in Jesus Christ God is coming **into all of it**. He is entering the city, and it will never be the same and neither will you and me.

Many leaders in the history of the world, before or since, have held their authority with might and with force.

If Jesus came to us this way, what would make him any different than any other leader, any other prophet, any other power?

Jesus was different! He is not any other leader or historical figure of interest and intrigue. This is the Messiah, the long-awaited One worth following.

Corrie Ten Boom was a famous Christian whose testimony of suffering in Nazi concentration camps and God's grace through it all touched millions of lives. Some time ago, in a press conference following a ceremony in which Corrie Ten Boom was given an honorary degree, one of the reporters asked her if it was difficult remaining humble while hearing so much acclaim.

She replied immediately, "Young man, when Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments in the road and singing praises, do you think that for one moment it ever entered the head of that donkey that any of that was for him?"

She continued, “If I can be the donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in his glory, I give him all the praise and all the honor.”

Me too. If I could be the donkey or even, like today, a member of the crowd who worships Jesus but then stays with him all the way to the cross, I would truly have hope, joy and peace, and you would, too.

Most Sunday sermons also are available via the church website, www.stpaulshouston.org, as well as pre-printed and on CD. Access the sermons on the website via either the Worship section or the Media Center. The pre-printed sermons are in the information rack at the Jones Plaza entrance to the Sanctuary Building. To order a \$5 CD of the complete worship service, contact Phyllis Brockermeier at 713-528-0527 or pbrock@stpaulshouston.org.