

**PALM SUNDAY**

**A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM R. FLEMING**

**MARCH 20, 2016**

**MARINERS' CHURCH OF DETROIT**

HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE  
LORD! HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!

“JESUS, WHEN YOU RODE INTO JERUSALEM, THE PEOPLE WAVED PALMS WITH SHOUTS OF ACCLAMATION. GRANT THAT WHEN THE SHOUTING DIES, WE MAY STILL WALK BESIDE YOU EVEN TO A CROSS.

ALMIGHTY AND EVER LIVING GOD, IN YOUR TENDER LOVE TOWARDS US, YOU SENT YOUR SON TO TAKE OUR NATURE UPON HIM, AND TO SUFFER DEATH UPON THE CROSS; GRANT THAT WE MAY FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF HIS GREAT HUMILITY AND SHARE IN HIS GLORIOUS RESURRECTION; THROUGH HIM WHO LIVES AND REIGNS WITH YOU AND THE HOLY GHOST ONE GOD NOW AND FOR EVER.”

THE PALMS AND PROCESSION REPRESENT THE LORD'S TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM A WEEK BEFORE THE RESURRECTION. IN THE UNREST THE PROCESSION CONTAINED A BLESSING OF THE PALMS WHICH ARE CARRIED AS SYMBOLS OF THE VICTORY OF CHRIST. ACCORDING TO THE CURRENT RITE, THERE IS A GENERAL BLESSING OF THE PALMS HELD BY THE PEOPLE. WE PROCESS INTO THE CHURCH AND MANY ARE STRUCK BY THE POMP AND JOY; BUT WITH ALL OF THIS, WE ALSO UNDERSTAND, NOW IS THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MARCH TO THE CROSS.

THEOLOGIAN'S HAVE DIVIDED THE LIFE OF CHRIST INTO TWO SEGMENTS: (1) THE HISTORICAL JESUS, WHAT WAS HE LIKE BEFORE DEATH. (2) THE CHRIST OF FAITH, WHICH REFERS TO WHAT HE BECAME AFTER HIS DEATH. THE EXPERIENCES HE UNDERWENT LED TO A CONVICTION THAT JESUS WAS NOT SIMPLY A FIGURE OF THE PAST. HE WAS A LIVING REALITY OF THE PRESENT. THIS IS THE BASIC MEANING OF

EASTER. AS JESUS' MINISTRY GREW, HE BECAME A MESSIAH, SON OF GOD, LORD, SAVIOR OF THE WORLD, WORD OF GOD, LIGHT OF THE WORLD, BREAD OF LIFE, AND A GREAT HIGH PRIEST. ALL OF THESE ARE NOT JUST NAMES, BUT MINISTRIES: (1) HE WAS COME FROM GOD. (2) HE WAS LIGHT OF THE WORLD WHO IMPACTED OUR WORLD MORE THAN ANYTHING OR ANYONE ELSE. (3) HIS LOVING AND CARING WERE THE BREAD OF LIFE FOR GOD'S CHILDREN. (4) HE WAS THE WORD OF GOD IN THE WORLD. IN HUMAN FORM, HE SPOKE, TAUGHT AND BLESSED HIS PEOPLE.

THIS QUOTE FROM A WONDERFUL RECITAL TIES ALL OF JESUS' HISTORY AND THE CHRIST OF FAITH TOGETHER TO THE FAITH WE LIVE: "JESUS REMAINS MY JOY, HE PROVIDES SOLACE AND STRENGTH, JESUS KEEPS ME FROM ALL SORROW. HE IS THE STRENGTH OF MY LIFE. MY EYES DELIGHT AND MY SOUL'S TREASURE AND BLISS ARE REAL. THEREFORE I CAN NEVER LET JESUS OUT OF MY HEART AND SIGHT."

WE'VE KNOWN IT FOR A LIFETIME BUT I ASK YOUR PATIENCE FOR A QUICK REVIEW OF THE STORY WHICH TOOK JESUS TO THE CROSS: THE COUNCIL WAS TOTALLY AGAINST JESUS AND ORDERED HIM PUT TO DEATH. THEY TOOK HIM TO PONTIUS PILATE. IN THE PROCESS, JUDAS APOLOGIZES AND RETURNS THE SILVER HE HAD STOLEN. THE RESPONSE FROM THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS WAS ESSENTIALLY "WHO CARES...WHAT IS THAT TO US". JESUS STOOD BEFORE THE GOVERNOR WHO ASKED HIM: "ART THOU THE KING OF THE JEWS?" JESUS SAID; "THOU SAYEST." WHEN JESUS WAS ACCUSED BY THE CHIEF PRIEST AND ELDERS, HE ANSWERED NOTHING. THIS QUESTION WAS DIRECTED TO JESUS: "HAVE YOU NOT HEARD HOW MANY THINGS THEY WITNESS AGAINST THEE?" HE ANSWERED HIM NEVER A WORD INSOMUCH AS THE GOVERNOR MARVELED AT HIS SILENCE. THAT GOVERNER WISHED TO RELEASE A PRISONER, CHOSEN BY THE CROWD. "WHOM SHALL I RELEASE, BARRABBAS OR JESUS." YOU KNOW THE ANSWER. ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING PASSAGES WHICH I HAVE STUDIED IS THE ONE WHERE PILATE'S WIFE SENT A MESSAGE TO HIM: "HAVE THOU NOTHING TO DO WITH THAT JUST MAN, FOR I HAVE SUFFERED MANY THINGS THIS DAY IN A BREATH BECAUSE OF HIM."

HE WAS IN THE PROCESSION, HE WAS ON TRIAL, BUT WE'VE HEARD A WOMAN TOUCHES HIM AND SHE WAS SAVED. HE ALSO TAUGHT US TO PREPARE FOR A HOLY WEEK WHICH WAS BRUTAL FOR OUR SAVIOUR, BUT DESPITE ITS PAIN, IT HAS GIVEN US ANOTHER CHANCE TO GROW IN GOD'S FAITH. PETER MARSHALL'S "A TOUCH OF FAITH" MAKES THESE POINTS:

- THE INCIDENT TAKES PLACE IN A CITY STREET. IT IS A NARROW, TWISTED STREET PACKED WITH A CROWD OF EXCITED PEOPLE, SURGING PAST ITS BAZAARS AND PAVEMENT STALLS WITH ALL THE NOISE AND CONFUSION OF AN EASTERN MARKETPLACE.
- A MURMUR OF CONVERSATION GROWS LOUDER AS THE PROCESSION PUSHES ITS WAY THROUGH THE NARROW STREET.
- THEY ARE CAUGHT UP IN CURIOSITY, AND WALKING ALONG IN THEIR VERY MIDST, WEDGED IN THE TIGHTLY PACKED PROCESSION, IS SOMEONE...IT IS HIS FACE THAT WILL HOLD OUR GAZE.
- THIS ONE WHO WALKS LIKE A KING IS NAMED JESUS. THEY CALLED HIM THE NAZARENE OR THE GALILEAN. HE CALLED HIMSELF THE SON OF MAN.
- THE MANY BEGGARS WHISPER HIS NAME IN THE STREETS AS THEY PASS, AND THE CHILDREN MAY BE HEARD SINGING ABOUT HIM. HIS NAME HAS BEEN BREATHED IN PRAYER AND WHISPERED AT NIGHT UNDER THE STARS. HE IS KNOWN TO THOSE IN NEED.
- THERE ARE SILENT MEN- WALKING STRANGELY AS IF UNACCUSTOMED TO IT- WHO SPEAK OF HIM WITH LIGHTS IN THEIR EYES.
- IT IS JESUS WHOM THEY ARE CROWDING TO SEE. THEY WANT TO SEE THAT LOOK WHICH SEEMS TO OFFER HEALING OF MIND AND SOUL AND BODY; FORGIVENESS OF SIN; ANOTHER CHANCE-A BEGINNING AGAIN. HE IS ON A MISSION OF RESTORATION, AND THE CROWD IS FOLLOWING HIM IN ORDER TO SEE HIM PERFORM THIS MIRACLE.

- THERE IS IN THE CROWD ANOTHER FACE- THE FACE OF A WOMAN. STRANGE THAT IT SHOULD BE SO NOTICEABLE-YET NOT STRANGE, FOR IT IS A FACE THAT PORTRAYS GREAT DEPTH OF HUMAN EMOTION. WHO IS SHE? WELL, SOME SAY HER NAME IS MARTHA. IT DOES NOT MATTER. SHE IS TYPICAL OF COUNTLESS CASES OF ENDLESS PAIN AND SUFFERING. FOR TWELVE YEARS SHE HAS SUFFERED AND TWELVE YEARS IS A LONG TIME!
- SHE IS TYPICAL OF HUMAN DESPAIR-NOT ONLY PHYSICAL DESPAIR BUT SPIRITUAL DESPAIR AS WELL. FOR HER THE WORLD COULD OFFER NO HEALING-SO SHE REPRESENTS ALL THE PEOPLE WHO ALSO LOOK EVERYWHERE.
- THIS WOMAN HAD HEARD OF THE GREAT TEACHER OF HIS WONDERFUL WORKS.
- SHE HAD HEARD WHAT HE HAD DONE FOR OTHERS. SURELY HE HAD POWER TO BRING HELP INTO THE HAVEN OF HEALTH.
- THERE CAME TO THE WOMAN THE ASSURANCE THAT IF SHE COULD BUT TOUCH HIM-EVEN ONLY THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT-SHE WOULD BE HEALED OF HER MALADY. CAN YOU IMAGINE HER NERVOUS REASONING? TOUCH HIM...YES...JUST TO TOUCH HIM-THERE WOULD BE NO HARM TO THAT! “IT WOULD BE ENOUGH-JUST TO TOUCH THE BORDER OF HIS ROBES. I MUST TOUCH HIM. I MUST GET SOME OF HIS POWER.” SHE IS ABLE TO REACH OUT HER HAND, AND WITH THE TIP OF HER FINGER TOUCHED HIS ROBE. IT WAS ENOUGH! SHE HAD ACTUALLY TOUCHED THE GREAT ONE. NO ONE HAD NOTICED HER,-NO ONE-BUT CHRIST!
- THEN HE ANSWERED HER: NOT IN SCORN AT HER ACTION, NOT IN RESENTMENT, NOT IN ANGER AT HER PRESUMPTION, NOT IN RIDICULE AT HER FAITH, NOT IN INDIGNATION AT HER AUDACITY BUT IN THE SYMPATHETIC TONES OF UNDERSTANDING LOVE. “DAUGHTER, THY FAITH HATH MADE THEE WHOLE. GO IN PEACE...AND BE HEALED.”
- MOST OF US ARE AROUND HIM-JUST LIKE THE CROWD...WE LOVE THE LORD AND RARELY TOUCH HIM...BUT HE TOUCHES US.

- WE PREACH THE IMMANENCE OF GOD. HE PROMISED THAT WE SHOULD HAVE SOME OF HIS POWER-TO DO AMAZING THINGS, SUCH AS TO HARBOR NO GRUDGES AND TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO HURT US, TO LOVE EVEN THOSE WHO TREAT US UNJUSTLY OR UNKINDLY TO PRAY FOR THOSE WHO GIVE US PAIN AND GRIEVE US TO CONFESS OUR OWN PRIVATE AND SECRET SINS TO TRY TO MAKE RIGHT SITUATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN WRONG, EVEN IF IT MEANS HUMBLING OURSELVES, SWALLOWING OUR PRIDE AND RISKING A SNUB OR A SLIGHT.
- HE WHO MADE THESE PROMISES IS HERE WITH US NOW. HOW CAN I, TODAY, TOUCH HIM WITH THE SAME RESULTS? ALL OF US NEED TO TOUCH THE HEART OF CHRIST FOR SOME REASON OR OTHER.
- FIRST, GIVE OUR GOD A CHANCE. TAKE THE PROBLEM, WHATEVER IT MAY BE, TO HIM IN PRAYER. THE SECOND STEP IS TO BELIEVE THE GOD WILL HEAR US. REMEMBER THAT HE HEARD THE POOR WOMAN WHO ONLY TOUCHED THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT. NEXT YOU MUST BE WILLING TO WAIT PATIENTLY FOR THE LORD. HE DOES NOT ANSWER EVERY PRAYER ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON. WE MAY HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL FRIDAY. BUT WAIT FOR GOD IS NEVER IN A HURRY BECAUSE HIS LOVE IS HERE.

TEACH US, O LORD, THE DISCIPLINES OF PATIENCE, FOR WE FIND THAT TO WAIT IS OFTEN HARDER THAN TO WORK. WHEN WE WAIT UPON THEE WE SHALL NOT BE ASHAMED, BUT SHALL RENEW OUR STRENGTH. MAY WE BE WILLING TO STOP OUR FEVERISH ACTIVITIES AND LISTEN TO WHAT THOU HAST TO SAY, THAT OUR PRAYERS SHALL NOT BE THE SENDING OF NIGHT LETTERS, BUT DIRECT CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD. THIS WE ASK IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.