

Palm Sunday Sermon – April 13, 2014

We enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart! We enter his courts with praise! Let us say THIS is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice, for He has made us glad! We start out this morning with SUCH exuberance, with SUCH celebration. That is what is SO good about riding into this Holy week with Jesus! That is what is so exciting about the triumphal entry, about our parade out on Kennedy Blvd. and around our neighborhood, although it is a little strange to those who are looking on. It may seem a little strange, to those who don't completely share our relationship with our hope and our holiness in Christ Jesus. After all, Jesus rode through the city on a donkey, and he, no doubt, looked like a peasant and he was known to have come from a small town, with no real claim to fame.

And yet, we are glad to make a joyful noise and to march our parade on the boulevard in Jersey City today, waving our branches of palms, even if it might be a little strange. We are happy to shout our hosannas and to sing our sweet songs of praise no matter that some people might wonder exactly what we are doing and some might barely even notice us. We are very glad if anybody wants to join in with us. Maybe we might be just what they needed this morning---a little joy, some hopeful sign and something to celebrate.

But oh my... how quickly things can take a turn for the worse. There is a debate, you know, that we have in the church every year around this time, and it is about whether or not to read the **long version** or the **longer version** of the gospel lesson on this Palm Sunday (or the Passion Sunday, depending on what you prefer to call it). There are good arguments for both points of view. Now considering that we start out with celebration and end up with Jesus being crucified, by the end of the week, I think there is a strong argument for making sure that we all see the big picture. Some people who are here today will not be here for the Seder on Wednesday or the foot washing on Thursday, or for Good Friday. The next time we may see some people will be Easter or even after that. It is important that they hear the whole story of what happened to Jesus for the sake of the world. Another debate we have in the church is about whether or not the preacher really needs to preach on this particular Sunday. Having heard this story and being taken on such an emotional rollercoaster, what else can be said about what happened to Jesus? So maybe the preacher doesn't need to preach...

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Oh, but then there are some questions. This story that begins with celebration and includes betrayal and trial, mob violence, denial, trickery, sacrifice, and all kinds of pain and anguish – (sound a lot like Shakespeare, doesn't it) this story tells us a lot and raises a lot of questions. I would have to preach a very long time in order to lay out all of the issues or to raise all of the questions that come up. And there is no way that I could really unpack all these issues or begin to answer all these questions this morning. So let me not try. No, I won't try, because we can only stay here for so long. But I will address just a couple of things.

For one thing – “Who is this Jesus?” That is what half the people in this room may be thinking, and many of the people out there are asking at this time of year, when Christians start talking about washing feet, and stripping with each other, and when they see Christians waving palms in the street. Who is this man who can still cause people to do all that after all this time? That question is a theme in the gospel we read today. Pontius Pilate is asking. The priests are asking, the crowds don't really know Him. And somehow He still seems so able to draw crowds and to make people uncomfortable. He is at once praised and despised. Even criminals and revolutionaries are challenging this man to show himself more fully, more plainly. They all seem to need some kind of clarification, some explanation or some deeper understanding about this man who is sometimes called Messiah, who is reported to be the King of the Jews, the Son of Man, and even the Son of God.

So there is that: “Who is this Jesus?” Well, I tell you this and maybe you have noticed already that Jesus is special. He is no ordinary man. One of my confirmation students asked me once: Is Jesus was supernatural? And I think that the answer to that question has to be YES. Yes. Jesus is supernatural! Jesus is supernatural because He did what none of us can do: Jesus overcame death! Jesus resurrected people and He was resurrected. Although Jesus was poor and vulnerable, mocked and defeated, rebuked and scorned and He never rose to any high political office or otherwise lofty position in this world, yet we are still singing His praises and aspiring to please Him. Even though Jesus was never super-successful or rich, we are still glorifying His name and we trust Him and have faith in Him and the hope of the church is built on Him. He is our foundation and although we have heard the ancient question of whether or not He was the king

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of the Jews, we are nevertheless, convinced that He is indeed our King and our sovereign Lord.

Yes, Jesus **is** supernatural because what He did, for our sake, was to demonstrate God's supernatural love for each of us, for the world. There is no love as wondrous as this love, that we see, when we ponder what happened in this story. God's love is supernatural and so God sent Jesus to die a supernatural death for us.

We can't say that other word yet, the one we put away when Lent began, but the church can say: **AMEN!** (*Listen for response: AMEN!*) We can say Hosanna, (*Listen for response: Hosanna!*) Hosanna, to the king! Sweet Hosanna! Who is this Jesus, who would not defend himself, who did not run from his persecutors, who rebuked his protectors and counseled them to be peaceful and to turn the other cheek in face of any attackers? This One is our salvation.

So yes! Jesus is supernatural, because in the natural world you are to fight back. Stand up for yourself, why don't you? Believe in yourself! In the natural world, there is no victory in death, or glory in humiliation. But in the kingdom of God, from the foot of the cross, we enter into something that is supernatural, and miraculous. As we enter into this holy week and hear these stories, we have entered into something that is utterly beyond this world!

We have decided to follow Jesus! We follow Him --- into Jerusalem, and we dine with him, and follow Him into the garden, and into the trial scenes, and all the way to the cross. We have decided to watch Him serve us, we have decided to stand at the foot of the cross and witness the sacrifice that He made for us. We allow him to wash us in His grace and we hear His penitential cry, when He had no sin. We watch Him take on our nature and we find our salvation in the blood of Jesus, who emptied himself for us.

Who is Jesus? ... He is the One who died for us. He has made us glad because we see in Him the **supernatural, wondrous love of God**. Now He is exalted and while the world looks on, WE PRAISE HIM. AMEN.