

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24 and Mark 16:1-8

Last Sunday we began our service by waving palms to welcome in the Messiah, and ended it by remembering his death. This morning we could be waving palms again in excitement of what has happened in the matter of a few days! But butterflies are more the theme of the day. One year for Lent I had people pick up small stones as they entered the sanctuary for worship, and during worship they laid their stones at the wooden cross. The stones symbolized things they would like to change. Prayers they were praying. Difficulties they were facing. The stones continued to pile up over the Lenten season. On the Saturday before Easter Sunday, I exchanged the stones for sparkly pastel colored butterflies, and the wooden cross for a small white draped cross. It was a vibrant remembrance that the resurrection changes everything.

On Easter Sunday, we can talk about two other types of stones: One is real, the other figurative. The first is the stone that was rolled away from the tomb by the unseen powerful hand of God. The second stone refers to the person within the tomb who left the tomb when the stone was rolled away. This person, Jesus Christ, is referred to as the Cornerstone. Foundation stones, or cornerstones, were important in the Middle East in Jesus' day. Scripture has many references to a cornerstone. There are several places a cornerstone is mentioned in the Bible. The 22nd verse of today's Psalm is what Jesus quoted in Matthew 21:42 when he said, "Have you never read in the scriptures:

'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? In the NT, see Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; and 1 Peter 2:7.

So, people in Jesus' day were quite familiar with cornerstones. In fact, ancient building construction relied on the cornerstone more than today. These days, the laying of a cornerstone is largely ceremonial and may have a time capsule inside. Dignitaries and celebrities may be invited to the laying of the cornerstone of an important public building. But it is ceremonial.

In Jesus' day, great care was taken in the selection of a cornerstone. The psalmist laughs in the knowledge that the stone that the "builders" rejected, in other words, found unsuitable as a foundation stone, has become the "chief cornerstone." On Easter Sunday, we, too, find this "marvelous in our eyes." And Easter Sunday is truly a day that "the LORD has made." We should, indeed, "rejoice and be glad in him".

Jesus, the risen Christ, is the cornerstone of our faith. And as a foundation stone, Jesus Christ is also the cornerstone of our lives. He is not merely a ceremonial stone that's nice to look at from time to time. He is the critical component of our lives, and everything else is ordered and aligned with this stone to ensure the structural integrity of our lives. In Matthew 6 we read "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added as well." Yes, Jesus was talking about food and clothing prior to this statement, but it goes beyond material goods. Put Jesus first and you find that everything falls into place. It

doesn't mean things will be easier, they may even be more difficult, but when your priorities are right the difficulties are easier to face. Knowing you do not have to face them on your own but having Jesus and his followers surrounding you gives you a strength you never can achieve on your own.

Christianity is different from all the other religions in the world because all it takes to be in a relationship with God is to believe. And no other religion has their god becoming human, dying a human death, and leaving an empty tomb behind. This is what we celebrate on Easter, this is what our faith is based upon, an empty tomb. Our God loves us so much he sent his only son to live as a human. Jesus was tempted in all the ways humans are tempted but he did not give into temptation; he lived a sin free life.

As he walked the earth he spread the good news of the kingdom of God. He had the power to heal the sick, to feed the hungry, and he proclaimed that God wants to be in a relationship with humanity. It costs nothing for this relationship. That's because Jesus paid the price when he died on the cross. But it didn't end there. Jesus came out of the tomb. He overcame death so that we, too, can overcome death.

Remember when I started out, I said we could be waving palm branches again this morning, but butterflies are a better symbol? Think of how a caterpillar lives, I mean, it's not a perfect example, but the caterpillar has a life. It is then encased in a cocoon, again, not a perfect example, but like being sealed in a tomb. Then the butterfly breaks out of the cocoon and flies free. Jesus, who was sealed in a tomb after his death, broke free and walked the earth again. He did it for us. So that we will not be kept in a grave but will be living in the presence of God for eternity simply because we believe Jesus is God's son who came to spread the love of God.

Yet the good news doesn't simply mean that we will be living a life after this life, it also means that we are to follow Jesus' example of treating people with honor and dignity. We are to follow Jesus' example of forgiving others. We are to follow his words, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus came to earth because God so loved the world that he wanted a tangible expression of his love that people could see, hear, touch, understand, and believe. That of course was Jesus. And Jesus changed the world in a way that is still today making positive effects.

As our psalm began this morning, Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, God's mercy endures forever. It goes on, The Lord is my strength and my song and has become my salvation. I shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord. I will enter the gates of righteousness and give thanks to the Lord. This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. All glory be to God.