

## THE HOUR IS HERE

Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Massachusetts

April 11, 1965

Palm Sunday

Scripture – Mark 11:1-11

### Introduction:

For our Scripture lesson we read the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as it appears in the Gospel of Mark. Before entering into the morning message, allow me to read another version of this same story as it is recorded by Luke. According to Luke, the disciples brought the colt to Jesus, and *"throwing their garments upon it, they sat Jesus upon it. And as he rode along, they spread their garments on the road. As he was now drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: 'Blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' And some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to him: 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.'*

To all intents and purposes, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem forms a significant point in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, the crowd being considered in this case as part of his followers. It is the hour to say:

*Hosanna!*

*Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Blessed be the kingdom of our father David that is coming!*

*Hosanna in the highest!*

The important thing is not that Jesus is entering the city of Jerusalem. The important thing is the meaning that the disciples give to this event. Their Hosannas and Alleluias are not just expressions of religious enthusiasm. These Hosannas and Alleluias express meaning – they are a recognition of the meaning of the life and ministry of Jesus. That is to say:

I. These Hosannas and Alleluias are connected with the promise that God would redeem his people. God is seen as acting through Jesus.

A. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus reads from the book of the prophet Isaiah:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."*

*"And he closed the book and said: 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your eyes.'" Notice the "Today" – the hour is here, so to speak. But the fact that Jesus claims to be connected with the inbreaking of God's kingdom causes people to stumble. "'Is not*

*this Joseph's son?' And they rose up and put him out of the synagogue, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him headlong."*

There is reaction here all right. His home town rejects him. There are no alleluias, no hosannas to the native prophet.

- B. John the Baptist is also puzzled about Jesus (Matt. 11:2-6)  
*"Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him: 'Are you he who is to come, or shall we wait for another?' And Jesus answered them: 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk; lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense in me."*

In Jesus' message and action we get a foretaste of the world to come.

- C. To Jesus' great surprise, neither the religious people nor the good people responded to his message, only the poor people, the sinners and the publicans. Only a few recognized that God had a present claim on their lives.
- D. Palm Sunday is a day of confession – of witnessing. We say: Hosanna! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord! The one who has come is Jesus – in his words and deeds God is claiming our lives.

Palm Sunday is the church's positive response to that claim. In other words, Palm Sunday is a day of decision.

- II. The Hosannas and the Alleluias are connected, also, with the fact that the inbreaking kingdom has to do with human beings. *"Blessed be the kingdom of our father David that is coming."*

Christ is the Son of God, but he is also of the seed of David. He was born of the Virgin Mary and suffered under Pontius Pilate. He is one of us. In his person, so to speak, God's concern for humanity assumes the highest possible specificity.

It is not with angels that the kingdom is concerned, but with human beings – the sons of Adam – the sons of Abraham – the sons of Joseph.

- III. The Hosannas and Alleluias are connected with a proclamation of freedom. We might call the Palm Sunday procession, the procession of freedom. Jesus dared to act with the conviction that God's action is not determined by the institutions of the past. The temple and all its intricate organizations have to give way in the face of a God who claims men for Himself and not for the institution.

He also dared to act with the conviction that the structures of government have no claim to the ultimate allegiance of man: *"Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the*

*things that are God's."*

The disciples and the crowd perceived that an encounter was about to happen, which would have religious and political repercussions. When they say, "Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! -- they are proclaiming victory in advance. They are saying: The bandwagon of God's freedom cannot be stopped.

Conclusion:

When I hear the Hosannas and Alleluias of Palm Sunday, I can only hear God's call on me. I hear the call to:

- (1) Go and meet people where they are.
- (2) Go and love people as they are.
- (3) Go and prepare for the worst.
- (4) Go, counting only on the sustenance of his presence.
- (5) Go and proclaim God's freedom.

This is the challenge of Palm Sunday.

We dare to proclaim: Hosanna! when institutions and government and even whole societies may mock and laugh and finally crucify us.

We dare to believe in God, when many are saying that God is dead.

We dare to believe in man and his freedom, when everybody is saying man is just the product of his environment or his heredity.

The meaning of Palm Sunday is that if we did not proclaim Jesus as God's word to us, the stones would do it. The palms and the garments are symbols of our faith in God's revelation in Christ.

Let us say Hosanna! But not an empty Hosanna. Let us do it because in Jesus we see God's kingdom breaking in. But remember that this is related to God's will. A woman said to Jesus: "*Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!*" But he said: "*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*"

Brethren, the hour is here for us to confess. Let us all say; Hosanna!

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