

HOSANNAS AND HIDDEN MIRACLES

PSALM 118:19-29

LUKE 19:28-40

A SERMON FOR PALM SUNDAY

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

MARIANNA, FLORIDA

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Years ago, when I was young and foolish, I had four different people, standing in four different areas of the church, read the four Gospel accounts of Palm Sunday. That left me with about five minutes to tie them all together. It is a fun thing to do, on a rainy Sunday afternoon: to read from Matthew 21, Mark 11 and John 12, and compare and contrast the details.

Several things stick out: the first is that the crowds greeted Jesus as though He were the coming messiah, the conquering hero.

This makes Palm Sunday what Will Willimon has called "one of the most politically charged Sundays of the year...Politics is about power, power to do good, power to change the world."

I don't doubt that the crowd on that Palm Sunday, at least part of them, expected Jesus to ride right up to the steps in front of Herod's palace, and call Herod out, and confront him as the usurper of the Throne of David, and I suspect they were bitterly disappointed that He didn't.

Another portion of the crowd expected Jesus to go to the palace of Pontius Pilate, and order that Roman invader to pack his duds and get out of town, taking his army and tax collectors with him.

What would have happened if Jesus had done that, we will never know, but Jesus was the king whose kingdom is not of this world, and Jesus is the king whose power is not based on armies, or on heredity, or on wealth or on politics. Jesus is a king who enters the city balanced on the back of a donkey.

And it is in that donkey that the hidden miracles of Palm Sunday lie concealed.

First of all there is the very procuring of the donkey: now in our world today, a donkey isn't worth much. I could have picked up all I could have hauled off from the Bureau of Land Management Adoption at the Ag Center a month or so ago for \$75 apiece. Maybe \$75 for the whole bunch if I'd agreed to take them all.

But in the day of Jesus, that donkey is the pick-up truck. It is the beast of burden, but it is also the means of transportation. And this was the brand-new one, the one with unlimited mileage and usage stretching out over thirty or forty years or more, for donkeys live long lives.

Imagine. A bunch of guys are sitting around in the shade on a Sunday morning, and someone comes walking down the road, jumps in the new pickup truck, and starts backing out of the driveway. All the guys run over, jerk the door open, and say, "What are you doing with this truck?"

And the man answers, "The Lord has need of it."

And the guys so, "Oh, well, if the Lord needs it, go ahead on then. If the Lord needs it, that's OK."

Not very likely, is it?

Suppose you'd just bought a new car and one of the elders stopped by and said, "By the way, we need your new car for the church." Well of course, you'd just hand over the keys and say, "God bless you!" wouldn't you?

That whoever owned that donkey was willing to let the little animal be used as the mount of the Messiah was a miracle, just a little one, but a miracle none the less. Miracles are times when God's ways over-ride our ways, and astonishing things often result.

Then, they took this little donkey, just a colt really, upon which no one has ever sat. And they pile garments, cloaks, coats, jackets, on its back, and they sit Jesus on top of that pile of clothing, and go down the road through a crowd singing, and laughing, and shouting "Hosanna", and strewing palm branches and more clothing on the pathway in front of Jesus on the donkey.

Have you ever seen a donkey buck? I have. My childhood friend Phillip Middleton and I won ten dollars once, when I figured out how to get Phillip to successfully ride a bucking donkey at a rodeo. That donkey had successfully bucked off all comers until I put Phillip on him facing backwards, with his legs wrapped around the donkey's neck, holding on to the donkey's tail.

Don't laugh, it worked! Won us ten bucks, well, ten dollars, and that was a lot of money back in 1957.

But Jesus didn't ride the donkey like that. Jesus got on the donkey like that donkey had carried him every day of his life, like that donkey might have been the donkey that carried His mother, Mary down the road from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea thirty-three years or so before.

And this new, young, never ridden donkey sensed the peace, the calm, the quiet, the confidence, the power in the man who was sitting on its back, and the second hidden miracle of Palm Sunday takes place: Jesus rides an unbroken, untrained, unriden donkey into the city.

Another little miracle, hidden by the very ordinary way in which we accept that something miraculous happened right before our eyes, and we didn't pay attention, we didn't recognize it for what it was.

Hidden miracles: now don't raise your hands, but how many of us sitting here today have had heart bypass surgery, or had a pace-maker or a stint inserted? How many of us have had radiation or chemotherapy or surgery for cancer, and have lived to tell about it? How many of us have had a hip or a knee replaced? How many of us have been in an auto accident that should have killed us but didn't? How many of us have had cataract surgery or surgery for a detached retina, and can see to read the bulletin today? How many of us are wearing hearing aids that actually work? Or have had a life-threatening illness or infection and been spared? How many of us have been in life situations where if we'd been an inch or a foot or a yard from where we were, we would not be here today? Or if we'd been a moment later or a moment earlier?

How many of us were told we'd never have children, and do? How many of us have heard that there was no hope, and found hope?

Were these things not out of the ordinary? They may not rise to the level of walking on the water or calming a storm at sea, but they are right up there with giving sight to the blind, and

hearing to the deaf, and if you've ever been coded, and then zapped with a defibrillator, you may understand a little bit about how Lazarus may have felt.

We live in a world where we are surrounded by miracles. The crowd on Palm Sunday, if they knew Jesus at all, knew Him as the worker of miracles, who had healed the sick and raised the dead, who had given sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, and cleansing to the leper.

He was not a mighty general, leading an army of soldiers. He was a prophet, leading a band of disciples. They came not with swords and spears, but with palm branches. And their cry was "Hosanna, hosanna, blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord."

We live in that age of hidden miracles. May our Hosannas join with the Hosannas of all the Palm Sundays past and yet to be as we honor the one who came humbly, riding on a donkey, and continue to work His hidden miracles each and every day.

And to Him be the glory, the honor, the dominion, and the praise, in the church and in the world, now and forever more. Hosanna, and amen.