

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
Dr. Jonathan Dent
The Servant King

April 17, 2011
Palm/Passion Sunday

Once a year, we take a month out of the year to consider what God is calling us to in terms of self-denial and service to God in Jesus Christ. We call this Lent. One week of the year, Holy Week, we consider the last week of our Lord's life, and consider how our lives are changed as a result of the last week of life in his earthly ministry. One day of the year, we look at the Cross, Good Friday and the Resurrection, Easter. I think it's a good use of our time. I hope you choose to take in as much of this coming week as you can. After 25 years of ministry, I am still learning much about Jesus, still surprised at what I am learning, still looking forward to learning more.

I am not a perfect follower. I have my faults, blemishes, rebellious side, just like you do. But I do want to give more of my self, more of my dreams and desires, more of my life to Jesus. And I hope you do too. What we do in worship here is more than a couple hours a week on a Sunday morning, more than a few words we say to acknowledge that we believe what we are doing is true and in line with reality, more than just another activity or community group.

This is the life changing, transformative journey of giving ourselves consciously to God, for God's merciful love and grace which makes us more like Jesus. This is the life we are inviting Tabitha and Nyakeyni to start even before they can walk or talk. This is the life we are continually invited to consider for ourselves, for our children, for our neighbors, for all those we care about.

And Palm Sunday is the day we acknowledge Jesus as King, as the long promised Messiah, the One to whom we can turn to, and know that he understands, that he walks with us, and longs to talk to us to make this life better and more than it is now. We wave our palms today in continuity with those in every country, language and tribe, with millions and hundreds of millions of other believers across the face of this planet, who choose to receive the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

This may have been the only day in Jesus' life where he was received with a measure of pomp and circumstance appropriate to his station, appropriate to

royalty coming to us, gracing us with his presence. Normally he would come to your home or mine during his earthly ministry, and you would know he was famous for his teaching and his healing ministry. You would have heard that he was even able to raise the dead. But he was the kind of man who was unassuming, he didn't put on airs, was kind in listening, not pushy, but able to speak out when he needed to do so. He cared. He would weep with you and the pain you were going through. But when he came over, you would not think of his royalty first, you would think of his caring and listening. He was more like you than you first thought when you had heard about him.

And now he is here, when we wave the palms, as much as he was here in his earthly ministry in the warm places near Jerusalem. He was the king received as the promise of David's son, bringing a new kingdom. But he was not the warrior king who would have come into the city with horse and chariot, but rather rides in on a young donkey, symbolic of peace and humility. The palms were strewn and waved before the king, garments were also strewn before the king, as in the days of the kings of Israel of old (cf. 2 Kings 9:13).

The key question as Matthew saw it, and heard it, was "Who is this?" (Matt. 21: 10) People shouted Scripture portions, such as "Hosanna to the Son of David," a Messianic phrase showing people asking Jesus to save them, probably for all kinds of reasons, politically, spiritually, emotionally, socially in a time of military occupation. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" refers to Jesus as well, and is a quote from Psalm 118:26, which we read earlier. "Hosanna" comes from Psalm 118:25, which is translated in the TNIV as "LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success!"

The saving God is doing today is still the saving of us from our rebellion against God and God's ways. This is the ongoing work of the Lord, from generation to generation, across the face of the planet. And so we are called this day to receive this Saviour.

But once again we ask the question, "Who is this king?" One of the many good answers to this question is found in one of our hymns in the *Book of Praise*. #379 is one of my favorites because it captures the servant role of Jesus, the Isaiah 53 perspective on what Jesus was doing with his life. I don't usually take time to explore any particular hymn, but so many of them draw us to an important understanding of who Jesus is, I feel I need to take

just a minute to look at this one. Let's take the hymnal and read together 379.

(1) From heaven you came, helpless babe, entered our world, your glory veiled, not to be served but to serve and give your life that we might live.

This is the history of Palm Sunday, that the king came incognito, not to take up his rights as king, but to lay them down, in order to bring us to God, in order that we might live.

Refrain: This is our God, the Servant King, he calls us now to follow him, to bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to the Servant King. *Kendrick makes clear that this is about us, each one of us here.*

(2) There in the garden of tears, my heavy load he chose to bear; his heart with sorrow was torn: "yet not my will but yours," he said. (Refrain) *Jesus takes the penalty of our sins on himself, so that we have the freedom to say 'yes' to God.*

(3) Come see his hands and his feet, the scars that speak of sacrifice, hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered. (Refrain) *The irony or paradox of God becoming human, giving up his rights as God and king, to serve us, to love us, to show us a better way, that was Jesus royal example. I love the image of the hands of the Creator being surrendered to the cruelty of the Cross to bring relationship to God, where we would not choose for God, Jesus would provide a way so that we could receive such as a gift and not a work that we perform.*

(4) So let us learn how to serve, and in our lives enthrone him, each other's needs to prefer, for it is Christ we're serving. (Refrain) *Jesus' life challenges us to serve others, not of compulsion or co-dependency or any other twisted application of service, but out of a choice to love.*

This hymn brings Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday together in a beautiful way. Let us continue to praise and worship our God this whole week, and through to the end of our lives.

Let us pray.