

**What Happens Now?
Matthew 21: 1-11
6th In A Lenten Series on Faith
March 16th, 2008
Palm Sunday
First United Methodist Church
Marquette, MI**

Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest!

What powerful words. What powerful faith! Or is it? What a grand entrance into the city of Jerusalem! What happens now? Good question! Palm Sunday is such an odd thing to preach on or teach on because we know how the story ends. Jesus was greeted with cheers and adulation by the crowds who lined the streets. They waved palms as a sign of the new king who will usher in a new era of peace. Only days later they will be chanting crucify him crucify him! Something is going to go terribly wrong.

On Palm Sunday we wave the branches, we welcome the children and it is treated like one big party for Jesus. However, the passion has been added to this Sunday in some traditions too mainly because a lot of people won't come to church on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday. Regardless, the Passion, which we observe later this week, is a reminder that these folks who were waiving palms earlier just didn't seem to get it. They have the words right but they still miss the point. Theologian Eugene Borning writes that: they have all the notes and none of the music. They have the theology straight, but they will still end up rejecting Jesus and calling for his death. Matthew is striking a familiar note: knowing truth is not the same as

doing truth. What one social psychologist said of university students is also true of the kingdom: "It is possible to make an A+ in the course on ethics but still flunk life."

What happens now? The branches have been cleared, the cloaks have been picked up and the people go back to their business. Maybe they were waiting for him to lead a grand march on the temple, or against Herod. Would they have rallied around him or would they have cowered in fear not wanting to get into trouble? The question is often asked of us as well around what we would do in the same situation. It is hard for us to know exactly. We hope we would have understood, we hope we would have done the right thing, but until we were in the situation, who knows? That is the irony of this day. We try to recreate this mob of chaos every year in hopes of catching the mood and to give us a glimpse. Peter Gomes writes that nobody knows really what's going on. "The only one seemed to have any peace or calm or mind about the whole thing is not Jesus but the donkey. The donkey is the only one who knows where he is going."

Do we know where we are going? Do we know what we are doing or what we are saying on this day? With some degree of honesty we can say that we do. We know what is to come this Thursday, and then this Friday. Some in the more Pentecostal tradition look forward to this week more than us mainliners, as we emphasize the blood, and the suffering and the humiliation and the death that is to come. All of this we cannot turn away from. Yet what will happen now?

Will we wave our palm branches and engage the powers of this world, as followers of Christ and live in the new Creation. When we take our palms home will we remind our leaders and our families that in the kingdom there is no place for hunger, or homelessness, no place for war or disease, that our resources rightly used should bring about the kingdom that was anticipated all those years ago. Will we even in the church understand that shelters and soup kitchens are while noble and a good thing will never fully bring about the kingdom. The systems that perpetuate this violence toward the human race must be confronted at their core and that is the challenge that Jesus laid down to the Scribes and the Pharisees and the Priests. He came to fulfill the law, by breaking down the systems that created such a state. That is ultimately what got him arrested, that is what got him executed as an enemy of the state.

In some sense every Sunday can be like a Palm Sunday, because thanks to God's grace, fully realized in this week, we always have a choice, a choice to begin anew and to take the steps in fulfilling our calling as the church to bring about the peaceable kingdom that God wants us to realize. We know that we cannot do it alone, that is why we trust that Christ is with us. There is perhaps no better time to ask the question than Palm Sunday as we say: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest! What happens now?