

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Palm Sunday, March 24, 2024.

Here we are. Another Palm Sunday. An annual event, which we look forward to because it's just a week away from Easter, which we really look forward to. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. We have a week to go. And it's a week filled with powerful events.

Well, what can one say about Palm Sunday that hasn't been said before? Let's start with the palm tree itself. Here are some characteristics of palm fronds.

They vary dramatically in shape, size, and color.

They are exceptionally hardy.

They produce some fruit that tastes good and some not-so-good.

They are useful on the tree – shade for example - and off the tree – making baskets and other useful items.

Okay. Here's an observation. What does this description of a palm frond sound like? It sounds like us, doesn't it? Different shapes, sizes and colors. Many produce fruit. Some of the fruit is delicious. With some we should approach with caution. For the most part, palm fronds are "hardy." Even when they fall from the trees, they have value. They provide strength.

Yes, we are like palm fronds. Indeed, if we could be a leaf – yes, any leaf – we might well choose to be a palm frond. For the most part, we are hardy, tough, useful. Even when we have finished one stage of life, there is, we trust, another stage. If we so choose, our influence can be felt in homes and businesses all over the world. In short, we can be tough, hardy and useful. We can enhance situations.

Enough, Mr. Preacher. We get it. What's your point? Well, actually there are three points. There's a shocker, I know.

Point one. Don't take things or people for granted. Enjoy them. Honor them. Take care of them. Don't throw them in a closet or shed.

Point two. Find uses for them. Look for potential. Help with realizing potential.

Study how others – neighbors and nations – rely on them and value them. For example, they provide shade, they strengthen fences, they enhance interiors and exteriors, they are found in medicines. Look at these verbs: provide, strengthen, enhance, heal. Many uses, in other words.

Point three. Appreciate that we are like palm fronds. We can contribute in all sorts of ways. We hope that people will take care of us. Not toss us away, but honor us by appreciating our value and potential.

A silly analysis? Perhaps. But maybe a useful reminder about all sorts of things having to do with honoring how God has blessed us. Don't take people for granted, or any part of the created order. Don't shortchange their potential. Don't get tired of them. Continue to love, honor, forgive, respect, care for, emulate.

We traditionally think of God in three ways: as creator, as savior, as sustainer. These dimensions are our dimensions as well. We are created in the image of God. God is reflected in you and me. God is particularly reflected in Palm Sunday and in the days that follow. But, you know who else is reflected in these three days, these three events, these three reminders?

You and I are not mere observers of Jesus entering the city with people greeting him, with some turning on him, and then missing him terribly. We have our own version of these events. It's not an accident that what the church calls Holy Week touches us at a deep personal level. What we feel at this time of year is no accident. We are part of the Story.

And, thanks be to God, we are part of the Story beyond the Crucifixion. Like the palm fronds, you and I have many uses even after falling from the tree. We are useful on the tree, and we are special off the tree. We are special period, thanks to a Loving God.

And right now, we are on the tree. And it's right now, on the tree, that we have many options for loving our neighbor as ourselves. But we also recognize that there will come a time when we will be off the tree.

But, thanks to a loving God, our usefulness will continue. In the meantime, we gather as a community, grateful for our blessings and mindful of our responsibilities in this life and the life to come.

And, in this spirit of thanksgiving and confidence, we will sing the four verses of hymn #522 "Glorious things of thee are spoken." This is a powerful hymn, with many memorable phrases. From the second stanza, here's one of the great phrases: "well supply thy sons and daughters and all fear of want remove."

So, my fellow palm-fronds. We move ahead, with confidence, thanksgiving, joy, and "fear removed." Are you kidding, Lord? "Fear removed." What a blessing for us, and for all with whom we share the Lord.

Yes, yet another function of the palm frond. "Fear removed." Who knew? Well, you and I know, don't we. It's why we're here. Pretty special. Thank you, Lord.

Amen.

Morning Prayer – Palm Sunday – March 24, 2024

Hymn 154, stanzas 1-3

All glory, laud, and honor

*All glory, laud, and honor to thee, Redeemer, King!
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.*

Thou art the King of Israel, thou David's royal Son,
who in the Lord's Name comest, the king and Blessed One.

*All glory, laud, and honor to thee, Redeemer, King!
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.*

The company of angels is praising thee on high;
and we with all creation in chorus make reply.

*All glory, laud, and honor to thee, Redeemer, King!
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.*

The people of the Hebrews with palms before them went;
our praise and prayers and anthems before thee we present.

*All glory, laud, and honor to thee, Redeemer, King!
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.*

BCP – Palm Sunday Greeting and Prayer

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.

Assist us mercifully with your help, O Lord God of our salvation, that we may enter with you upon the contemplation of those mighty acts, whereby you have given us life and immortality; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Collect for Palm Sunday

Almighty and everlasting God, who, of your tender love towards mankind, has sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Have mercy on me, O Lord, I for I am in trouble;

my eye is consumed with sorrow, and also my throat and my belly.

For my life is wasted with grief, and my years with sighing;

my strength fails me because of affliction, and my bones are consumed.

I have become a reproach to all my enemies and even to my neighbors, a dismay to those of my acquaintance;

when they see me in the street they avoid me.

I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind;

I am as useless as a broken pot.

For I have heard the whispering of the crowd; fear is all around;

they put their heads together against me; they plot to take my life.

But as for me, I have trusted in you, O Lord.

I have said, "You are my God."

My times are in your hand;

Rescue me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.

Make your face to shine upon your servant,

and in your living-kindness save me."

Second Reading – Philippians 2:5-11

Hymn 155 – Ride on! Ride on in majesty!

Ride on! Ride on in majesty! Hark! all the tribes hosanna cry;
thy humble beast purses his road with palms and scattered garments strowed.

Ride on! Ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die;
O Christ, thy triumphs now begin o'er captive death and conquered sin.

Ride on! Ride on in majesty! The angel armies of the sky
look down with sad and wondering eyes to see the approaching sacrifice.

Gospel – Mark 1-11

Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins

BCP – page 96 - The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He as conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

BCP – page 97 – the Lord’s Prayer

The Lord be with you.

And with thy spirit.

Let us pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

BCP – page 97-98 – Suffrages A

Show us your mercy, O Lord;

And grant us your salvation.

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

Let you people sing with joy.

Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;

For only in you can we live in safety.

Lord, keep this nation under thy care;

And guide us in the way of justice and truth.

Let your way be known upon earth;

Your saving health among all nations.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And sustain us with your Holy Spirit.

BCP – page 257 – Prayer for Mission

O God of all the nations of the earth: Remember the multitudes who have been created in our image but have not known the redeeming work of our Savior Jesus Christ; and grant that, by the prayers and labors of your holy Church, they may be brought to know and worship you as you have been revealed in your Son; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

BCP – page 258 – Prayer for Peace

Almighty God, kindle, we pray, in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with your wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth, that in tranquility your dominion may increase until the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

BCP – page 101 - The General Thanksgiving

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants
give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness
to us and to all whom you have made.*

*We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by
our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*

*And, we, pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly
thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips,
but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking
before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ
our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory
throughout all ages. *Amen.**

Announcements

Hymn 717 - America – portions of stanzas 1 and 3

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
Long my our land be bright with freedom's holy light;
Protect us by thy might, great God, our King.*

BCP – page 59 – Prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication unto thee, and hast promised through thy well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. Amen.

BCP – page 59 – The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *Amen.*

Hymn 522 – Glorious things of thee are spoken

*Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God;
he whose word cannot be broken formed thee for his own abode;
on the Rock of Ages founded, what can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded, thou may'st smile at all thy foes.*

*See! the streams of living waters, springing from eternal love,
well supply thy sons and daughters and all fear of want removed.
Who can faint when such a river ever will their thirst assuage?
Grace which like, the Lord, the giver, never fails from age to age.*

*Round each habitation hovering see the cloud and fire appear
for a glory and a covering, showing that the Lord is near.
Thus deriving from their banner light by night, and shade by day,
safe they feed upon the manna which he gives them when they pray.*

*Blest inhabitants of Zion, washed in the Redeemer's blood!
Jesus, whom their souls rely on, make them kings and priests to God.
'Tis his love his people raises over self to reign as kings:
and as priests, his solemn praises each for a thank offering brings.*

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Palm Sunday Lessons

Isaiah 50:4-9

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm 31:9-16

Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble;

My eye is consumed with sorrow, and also my throat and my belly.

For my life is wasted with grief, and my years with sighing;

My strength fails me because of affliction, and my bones are consumed.

I have become a reproach to all my enemies and even to my neighbors,
a dismay to those of my acquaintance;

when they see me in the street they avoid me.

I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind;

I am as useless as a broken pot.

For I have heard the whispering of the crowd; fear is all around;

they put their heads together against me; they plot to take my life.

But as for me, I have trusted in you, O Lord.

I have said, "You are my God.

My times are in your hand;

Rescue me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.

Make your face to shine upon your servant,

and in your loving-kindness save me."

Second Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel: Mark 1:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the field. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

The Gospel of the Lord. *Praise be to thee, O Christ.*