

HOPE, Fresno  
Dr. Jan L Womer

PALM SUNDAY  
March 16, 2008

Isaiah 50:4-9a  
Philippians 2:5-11

Psalm 31:9-16  
Matthew 26:14-27:66

### *Channel Surfing Through Life*

I cannot think of a better day in the whole Church Year for a pastor to preach in a congregation for the first time than today - Palm Sunday - the Sunday when we reflect on the whole Passion story of Jesus' last days in his earthly life!

On Maundy Thursday we will look at a small part of the story; we will do the same on Good Friday;...but today we take the "mega look". We see the power of the great drama of those last two days. For me, it is in this great overview that Jesus' Passion speaks to my life. The story is filled with many situations that are so human, so common that we can see similar experiences in our own life. We see emotions, moving from shouts of "Hosannah" to cries of "Crucify him"; emotions raging from tears of joy to tears of fear, of remorse, and of grief.

For me, Palm Sunday and the Passion of Jesus brings me face to face with my own life, my own experiences. I hope it can speak to you with that same power of God's presence in our world of continually changing experiences. Sit quietly when you can and read Matthew, chapters 26 and 27 and let it apply to your life journey. You will be surprised with the relationship it creates.

The scenes in the story of Jesus' Passion present a drama of great betrayal, magnificent defeat, blood, money, denial, and death. It is all there and it reminds us of our own lives, even though we are far removed from the city of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. As we read the Passion, it is like a whole series of channels and we can just push the button and move from one dramatic scene to another.

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Have you ever wondered what went through Jesus' mind as he entered into the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday?

Here are people waving branches, cheering him on. What a pleasant reception! But a few days earlier he had told his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and that there he would be rejected and face suffering. Remember good old Peter's quick response? *O Jesus, don't talk like that. It's so negative.* And then Jesus response: *Peter, knock it off. Get behind me, Satan!*

Jesus moved forward. He also knew that the end would not be defeat on the cross, but victory and new life at the empty tomb.

Our life journeys can be like that too. The joys on one side but the fears of unknowing, the hurt and pain on the other. It happens in our personal lives; it also happens in our families and in our congregations.

Dear people of Hope Lutheran Church, you are in that Palm Sunday Parade. It is now a part of your congregation's journey. Your Good Friday, the time of disbelief, of crying our "how can this be?", your wishing history could be changed, or erased or just immediately disappear and go away, your feelings of disappointment and, yes, even anger....all of this has come for you before the Palm Sunday Parade into the future, rather than afterward, as it did for Jesus.

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It doesn't matter when the hurt came; what matters is that the Palm Sunday parade goes on because it is our journey in God's care to new life, a new future, new joys. As there was Resurrection for Jesus, so there is Resurrection for Hope Lutheran Church. This is God's promise and gift to all who will make the journey!

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Someone has said that life is a handful of short stories, pretending to be a novel. Do you ever feel that way?

Maybe the Gospel - the great drama of how God is with us in the world in Christ - is a series of short sketches, situation comedies, thirty-minute vignettes, which one day will add up to THE great drama...and we will be a part of it too.

Will Rogers said:

*"We can't all be heroes because someone has to sit on the curb and clap as they go by."*

But we do not gain much if we just keep changing the channel and looking only at the happy and positive events of Jesus' life that make us smile. It is great to watch the events of Palm Sunday and of Easter, but in-between are the sad and depressing moments of betrayal and denial, and abuse, and lying, and vengeance. There was intense suffering and death. There also was forgiveness!

Easter has its greatest power when we see it as the conclusion of that meal in the Upper Room and the slow death of Jesus on the Cross.

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In our own lives there are the Palm Sundays and the Easters...the days of joy and celebration and hope and revitalized life.

There are also the Gardens of Gethsemane and the crosses of Calvary.

We celebrate marriages and births; we rejoice at graduations and job advancements.

We also sit quietly beside hospital beds, feeling helpless and maybe even hope-less. We stand at graves and see the parting from the generation before us...and then of our own generation as well.

Life is like surfing through the channels of every drama that has ever been written. We slide from one scene to another. We yearn to turn one off so that we can get to one that is better. How often do we hear, *"I hope this year will be better than last year."*

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It is easy to begin surfing through the channels for support and vision in life too. We are looking for meaning and hope and we turn from one place, one activity, to another, seeking inner peace.

Do you ever see that in your own life? I certainly do in my own.

A few years' ago I read a book that relates personality traits with prayer. Some of you have probably been through the Myers-Briggs material to tell you something about your type of personality. The point of the book on prayer was this: different styles of prayer will fit one personality very well and be almost meaningless to another.

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To take a very energetic, out-going, socially concerned and active person and say "sit in silence three hours a day and pray" would probably either kill them or their prayer life!

People move from one Christian tradition to another, from one religion to another, looking for meaning and something that will make sense.

They just keep surfing through the channels of life hanging on to each one for a while and then becoming restless and beginning the search again.

The initial attraction, whatever it was, does not bring a depth that speaks to our human soul and our deepest yearning in our real world of daily life.

Let your eyes and your mind and your heart lead you through the Passion of Jesus this week. Look at all the channels it will reveal.

You will see human lives searching for meaning....whether it is the women at the cross, or Peter or Judas or Pilate or the thief on the cross next to Jesus. Each one of them was trying to put the pieces of their life together and to make sense of what was happening around them and to them.

But we need search no further for the answer to life. The answer is the one hero who attracts our attention:

-the man entering Jerusalem on a donkey

-the man embraced by his friend so the soldiers would know who to arrest

- the man who looked into Peter's face just as Peter proclaimed "I don't know who he is!"
- the man who looked down from his cross at those who had hurt him so badly and prayed "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing"
- the man who stands outside his grave and who will be standing beside ours as well to invite us to step out into the new resurrection life that comes from God alone.

Let his words and his example be the power that guides you mind and your life each day.

Amen.