

March 24, 2013 – Palm Sunday

LOSING OUR MINDS FOR THE MIND OF CHRIST
by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

Today we celebrate the one who entered Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday. It was an exciting day; Palm Sunday Gospel is about a triumphal ride among cheering throngs and children with palm branches singing "Hosanna!" In the modern Church, the church calls Palm Sunday, "The Sunday of the Passion." It is all about pain and suffering.

The writer of the gospel of Matthew was so excited in writing about this grand entrance he implies that Jesus rode two animals at once! *...they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.* Such exuberance only endears us more to this gospel.

He entered the city, not on a warhorse, but on a donkey, a symbol of humility. And the people *spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.* He heard the praises. The multitude probably did not encompass the whole city, but a crowd around one gate as Jesus rode in on a borrowed donkey. This was a first-century version of the red carpet treatment.

Of course we read the story with a broken heart, for we know what lies ahead. We know that the crowd is fickle and will turn on Jesus. And Jesus knew that no matter what anyone said today, He was going to die on Friday. We know about the agony of the garden, the betrayal of Judas, the trial and the crucifixion. We know what they do not yet know.

What must it have taken, what sort of attitude or thought process must Jesus have had to ride into town, and walk the path we call holy week, knowing He was going to face betrayal, arrest, crucifixion and death? It would require self-possession. It would require a real sense of mission. It would require an enormously strong will, and it would require humility of a remarkable quality. And this frame of mind is what we are exhorted to imitate in our text, when Paul writes, "have this mind among you."

The chief characteristic of this attitude or frame of mind is humility. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in

the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself.

That is humility. Jesus Christ was God - is God. Whatever it is to be God, with all the power and glory, Jesus had it. He could do anything, anywhere, anytime. There is no way to appreciate what Jesus had or what He gave up. But He did not count that possession too great or too precious or too important to be set aside. He did not hold His own glory and power and prerogatives as more significant or desirable than our salvation. He counted redeeming us as more important than the enjoyment of His own participation in the glories of the Trinity.

The central word in the story is “Hosanna.” It has a light, airy sound. It sings well! Matthew tells us that the crowds went both ahead of him and behind him shouting that word. *Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!* What exactly does that mean? We sing it as a word of praise, but it literally is a massive cry for help. It means “Save now!” Don’t delay; save us now!

Here were massive numbers of Jewish pilgrims, fed up with the nightmare of Roman occupation, fed up with being jerked around by puppet rulers like Pilot, fed up the rudeness of the Roman soldiers who had no respect for their religion. “Hosanna!” they shouted, and everyone knew what it meant. But just to make sure there was no mistaking what political implications were involved, they added one more line: *Hosanna to the Son of David!* King David was remembered as a great military leader who overthrew every enemy and gave Israel their independence. By identifying Jesus as a “Son of David” the crowds were asking for a revolution to be led by none other than this man riding on a donkey. And what’s more, they wanted it now.

“Hosanna”—save now! None of this sweet by-and-by business; we want it now!

This understanding helps us make sense of two key parts of the Holy Week story. The first is the action of Pilot. In offering freedom to a revolutionary prisoner named Barabbas, he was appeasing the revolutionaries. The second is the disappointment of the disciples and especially Judas, because Jesus refused to lead the kind of revolution they wanted. Jesus had a different mind about revolution!

That would also explain the perplexity of the disciples at the Last Supper when Jesus spoke of his own shed blood. His words that night: *...my body, given for you...my blood, shed for you....*, strike a deep chord within us, for we know that his kind of revolution is deeper than the revolution of politics that comes at the ballot

box and deeper than the revolution of violence that comes with the military. His revolution has to do with the heart and the mind.

Apostle Paul was thinking through the events of Holy Week, when he wrote a letter to one of his favorite church folks, the Philippians. Paul was filled with gratitude for the genuine, gifted and sincere members of that church. But as wonderful as that church was, it was having a problems. To them, he said, *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who...emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.*⁵

The same mind, a beautiful mind, a mind that we can share with Christ. Let the same mind be in you that refused to enter Jerusalem in royal splendor, but instead chose a donkey, a symbol of humility. Let the same mind be in you that trusted God in spite of the betrayal and desertion of his closest friends, the agony of his trial and scourging, the humiliation and cruelty of the cross. Let that mind be in you, he said.

For Jesus didn't give up being God or all of the powers and glory of God forever. He set them aside for a time. He laid aside His power and took on human frailty. He laid aside His knowledge and became an infant in the womb. He laid aside His glory and became not merely human, but a helpless child, in an insignificant family, in a backwards region of a poor nation under military occupation. That is what Paul means when he says that Jesus "emptied Himself." That is humility, humbling Himself beyond all reason and setting aside His own comfort, glory and prerogatives for the well-being and salvation of us - sinful humanity. He counted nothing as "too much" to give in order to accomplish His purpose which is our redemption from sin and death and eternal damnation.

That is the attitude that we are challenged to imitate and emulate and make our own. If you want to think like Jesus - you should imitate humility. That was the "mind of Christ" - humility which permitted Him to become one of us and to die so violently and shamefully for us. We are to partake of that humility too. We are to humble ourselves in our own minds so that our interests and our comfort can take second place to the welfare and spiritual health of others! This is not about allowing someone to make you do something, it is about doing it yourself, because it is right, setting others and their needs first before our comforts, our preferences, our personal pride and even our own needs simply because it is the will of God that we do so.

The mind of Christ is the attitude of humility marked by love. He loved us so much that He endured the loss of all things. His love was so deep that He was willing to take our sin on Himself and endure the wrath of God against us, so that we will never need to. The passion and the cross were truly terrible, and the wrath of God which caused Him to abandon His only-begotten Son to bleed and die on the cross alone is beyond our comprehension. The humility of Jesus Christ led Him to do all of that so that we might be forgiven, justified, and brought into the love of God by grace. His resurrection and eternal life are also ours. It is won for all humanity and poured out on all and possessed by those that trust God and believe His Word and love. "He that believes and is baptized, shall be saved!"

Let God change your mind, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that you will be able to think like Jesus. You cannot outrun God's goodness or out-give His generosity or overestimate the care and concern which God has for you. What God is saying through Paul, and through me this morning, is walk in the light of the love of God and live true Humility. Trust God to be your supply and take care of one another. Live in the abundance, for God has given you everything you need. God has placed you here to love and take care of one another and to share His love with those who have not yet believed.

Let this mind be in you, that even when you are facing the greatest challenges of your life, strength can still be found in weakness, goodness can be found in choosing to serve others, and life can be found where we thought there was only death. *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus*, for God is at work in you!

With Palm Sunday, we all enter Holy Week. We can enter in the fancy carriage of arrogance: my ideas are better than yours...my religion is better than yours...my denomination is better than yours...my traditions are better than yours.... We can ride into Holy Week with all the splendor of arrogance.

Or we can enter this week as Christ did: with feet dangling awkwardly over the sides of a donkey, with love for all God's children, and with courage based on the reality that God is with us.