

Luke 21:12-17
Sixth Sunday in Lent – Palm Sunday
Sermon Series: Ironies of the Passion
Do You Hear What These Children Are Saying?

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
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Pastor Paul Krueger
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One Sunday morning, a pastor and his wife were trying to herd all of their kids into the car so they could get to church. To add to the already hectic atmosphere, one of his sons had misplaced his belt. As he frantically helped his child search for the belt, the pastor was getting more and more frustrated. Finally, his little boy noticing his frustration piped up, “Daddy, have you prayed about it?” It gave him a moment of pause. He’d spent the last seven years teaching his son the importance of prayer. But now, it was he who needed the lesson.

You wouldn’t think a pastor or any religious leader would need the words of a child to communicate to them what God shows us in His word, but it happened that Sunday morning. Sometimes grown-ups, even pastors, need the simple statements of children to remind us of what is important. I think that’s why that hymn we just finished singing has become such favorite in the years since it was composed, because it tells of little children joyfully calling out their Savior’s praises. “Hosanna, loud Hosanna, the little children sang; through pillared court and temple, the lovely anthem rang.”

That song has become such an iconic part of our Palm Sunday worship traditions that you might be surprised to find out it isn’t actually written about Palm Sunday. It’s actually written about events that took place the following day. The text which we’ll be considering this morning tells us about those events. Let’s give our attention to those words from Matthew 21:12-17.

¹² Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³ “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

¹⁶ “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise?” ¹⁷ And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

We don’t always get God’s personal commentary on the things that He had His servants write down for us in the Bible, but we do get a little piece of that today. Take a look again at verse 15. **But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things [Jesus] did...** So the commentary we get is that one little word, “wonderful.” Those Jews certainly didn’t think anything was wonderful, they were angry at what Jesus had done. But God shows us here that all Jesus had done that day was indeed wonderful.

So what had He done? There are two separate things we have recorded for us here. First, Jesus cleansed the temple. Then, He healed the blind and the lame who came to Him there. It wasn’t the first time Jesus had cleansed the temple. In John 2, we read that Jesus had done the same thing three years earlier at the very start of His ministry and He here is at it again. It seems

that every year at Passover the Jews had gotten into the habit of turning the temple and its courts into a market place. They required that any temple taxes would be paid in Jewish shekels and they charged a hefty fee on currency exchange. On top of that, they sold the animals there that people would need for their sacrifices at prices that were up to sixteen times the actual value! So they hadn't just turned God's house into a market place, they were ripping people off like hotdog vendors at a baseball game! And the priests were taking a cut!

Jesus wasn't having it. His Father's house was intended to be a place where people could come to bring their prayers and make their sacrifices, not a venue to make a quick buck out of those who sought to do God's will. We don't know how long those disgusting practices had been going on, but you can bet it dropped the jaws of bystanders when they saw Jesus start flipping tables.

The second event which took place that day is another familiar scenario, one that Jesus had been doing since the beginning of His ministry and all along up until this point. As people brought their sick and the blind and the crippled to Jesus, He healed them. Now we've heard and read of so many of the miracles of Jesus that it could be pretty easy to just blaze past verse fourteen there. It almost seems insignificant to us, as we look at all the things that happened during Holy Week. But to those people who were healed and to their families, it was extremely significant. It was incredible and wonderful.

So we have those two, wonderful things which Jesus accomplished and then we two completely opposite responses. As the children who were gathered there saw Jesus afflicting those who were comfortable in their sins and comforting those who were afflicted, they started up that chorus they had heard the day before when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, "Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna to the Son of David!"

Those children cried out, just as the crowds had done the day before, that Jesus was God's chosen Messiah. Over the past six weeks, we've been taking time each Wednesday night to study the Ironies of the Passion. Each evening as we gathered together, we looked at one of the ironic statements or events that took place during this Holy Week of Jesus' passion that we begin celebrating today. These little children, convicted by the Holy Spirit through the wonderful things they had seen that Jesus was their Savior, isn't ironic. The irony is that as Matthew tells us **when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things [Jesus] did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.**

These men were self-proclaimed experts in the Scriptures. They spent their days reading and studying the Bible. But when Jesus arrived, fulfilling all the prophecies of the Scriptures to the letter, they refused to believe that He was the Messiah, and they were angry that the children were saying that was who He was. Unlike the pastor whose son reminded him to pray, these men didn't even pause when these children reminded them of what the Scriptures said.

How much have things changed today? Jesus comes into His temple to drive out evil and to perform miracles of healing. He does wonderful things in His temple. The only difference is His temple is no longer a building in Jerusalem; today, His temple is you. That's why Palm Sunday is a day that is still worth celebrating all these years later. It wasn't just the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem so that he could clear out the temple and heal some sick people. Palm Sunday was the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem so that He could be raised up on a cross and killed. The hour had come for the Son of God to die, so that with His death He could pay the penalty for the sins of the world.

On the day of your baptism, Jesus performed those same, wonderful deeds that He carried out this Monday long ago. He came into your heart and He cast out the evil that was there. He brought you from spiritual blindness into the light of His Gospel. Now, every single day, He gives you that Gospel message in His Holy Word so that, remembering those wonderful things that took place at your baptism, you can continue to drive that evil away and be strengthened and healed by the power of God's Word.

Not only are those wonderful works active in your heart, by God's grace, they're at work in your lives as you carry that same Gospel message out into the world. That message, that Jesus is our Savior, God's chosen Messiah, who came to give His life for us to take away our sins and to give us an eternal inheritance in His heavenly kingdom is still met by those same two-fold response we saw on that Monday during Holy Week.

Many still reject it. They refuse to believe that Jesus came into this world, and rode into that city to take away their sins. They refuse to believe it because to believe it means they have to admit that they are sinful. Receiving the salvation that Jesus came to bring means acknowledging that God has judged us for our sins and that we need salvation. Accepting that would mean that there must be an absolute standard of what is right and what is wrong. And that goes against the grain of what so many of us have been told. It's tempting to believe that you make your own truth, that what's right and wrong depends on what is best for your current situation. It's tempting because then you get to do whatever you want to do. The eternal standards and absolute truths of God's law are terrifying to people because ultimately what those standards mean is they are wrong, they are guilty, and they deserve to go to hell.

But there is another standard. Another truth which on Easter Sunday was made absolute. Jesus has paid for your sins. As we embrace that truth, we know that we are sinful, and we know what we deserve because of our sins. But yet we know that like our children here, and like those children in Jerusalem 2000 years ago, we can confidently sing that our Savior, Jesus loves us. We can sing Hosanna to our King. Because we know that, because of Him, our sins have been forgiven. We know it because the Bible tells us so.

This week we have the opportunity to witness the depths of that love that Jesus has for us. We'll see on Maundy Thursday how Jesus established that covenant of His love with us and instituted the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of that love and as a means by which He personally reaches out to us with the forgiveness of sins and the joy of salvation. On Friday we'll gather together to celebrate the final moments when Jesus brought that salvation to completion. And a week from today, on Easter Sunday, we'll join our voices in song once again as we see in our Risen Lord the proof of our salvation. In the weeks following Easter, we're going to have an opportunity to look at the glorious absolute truths of that Easter gospel message.

So today, as we hear what those children are saying, that Jesus is the Messiah, our Savior who loves us and takes away our sin. Let us join in their wonderful song.

Amen.