

PALM SUNDAY SERMON 4-13-2014

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i UCC

Scripture: **Matthew 21:1-11**; Ps 118:1-2, 19-29

Message: **"GOD Will Never Desert Us!"**

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GATHERING IN THE WORD OF GOD

“This is the day that GOD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it” bursts out of Psalm 118! Let us sing, dance, and celebrate! GOD’s aloha endures and goes on forever! GOD gives us light and invites us to a celebration of praise! Even with threats, intimidation, bullying and fear—we can still dance, make music, and celebrate the Spirit that gives life! Amen!

We can celebrate even on this Palm Sunday before Maundy Thursday and Good Friday because GOD’s universal and intimate aloha! We have the mind of Christ in us! Christ rules from among us, embracing our mortality and humanity, feeling our pain, and rejoicing our successes. The “**kenotic**” (self-emptying) Christ is the celebrating Christ—living through every season of our life!

Every knee bows – yes, every knee! – in universal praise!

Mahalo and thanks to our children and young people and their teachers and parents and our choir for our exciting Palm Sunday beginning to worship!

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

Matthew 21:1-11 (The VOICE Bible)

21 ¹Jesus, the disciples, and the great crowds were heading toward Jerusalem when they came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus stopped and beckoned to two of the disciples.

Jesus: ²Go to the village over there. There you'll find a donkey tied *to a post* and a foal beside it. Untie them and bring them to Me. ³If anyone tries to stop you, then tell him, "The Master needs these," and he will send the donkey and foal immediately.

⁴*He sent the disciples on ahead so His entry into Jerusalem could fulfill what the prophet Zechariah had long since foretold:*

⁵Tell this to Zion's daughter,
"Look—your King is approaching,
seated humbly on a donkey,
a young foal, a beast of burden."

⁶So the disciples went off and followed Jesus' instructions. ⁷They brought the donkey and foal *to Jesus*, they spread their cloaks on the animals, and Jesus sat down on them. ⁸The great crowd followed suit, laying their cloaks on the road. Others cut leafy branches from the trees and scattered those *before Jesus*. ⁹And the crowds went before Jesus, *walked alongside Him*, and processed behind—all singing.

Crowd: Hosanna, praises to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Eternal One! Hosanna in the highest!

The way Jesus enters the city on a lowly donkey, with crowds surrounding Him singing praises, surprises many within Jerusalem.

¹⁰*And that is how Jesus came into Jerusalem. The people noticed this strange parade. They wondered who this*

could be, *this humble bearded man on a donkey who incited such songs.*

Crowd: ¹¹This is Jesus, the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee.

The name “Jesus” was a pretty common name back then and is the equivalent of Joshua in Hebrew. Jesus’ home town of Nazareth was a small *hick town* to many people back then. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Contained in that sneering question is more than just a hint of big city folks and their *looking down on* for those who come from the country and small towns.

So in this urbane and sophisticated Jerusalem—telling the people that the center of this makeshift parade is Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee probably didn’t make a big impression! Matthew doesn’t record any reaction of verse 11’s answer to the question—“Who is this?”

Jesus looked just like most people. He was utterly mundane and ordinary in so many ways! The fact that Jesus was the Christ—the Son of GOD—was not clearly written all of his face! As the gospels make clear—GOD seems to have orchestrated Jesus’ life in such a way that even back then a person needed the gift of faith to believe there was more to Jesus of Nazareth than met the eye!

- ✓ Jesus didn’t have an impressive resumé.
- ✓ Jesus did not have some meteoric rise to success and a world-wide notoriety.
- ✓ Jesus could not claim some privileged birth and did not exactly lead what everyone would have described as a charmed life.

✓ But Jesus did most of his best ministry out *in the sticks of Galilee*.

So in verse 10 the people ask, “Who is this?” It was a good question. Jesus was not a famous person. If anyone say anything special about Jesus—it was because of faith!

So Jesus enters the City of Jerusalem – that’s what this morning’s Palm Sunday is about—the beginning of Holy Weeks! The children seem to be the only ones celebrating! It was exciting to shout, “Hosanna!” and to keep screaming it as the parade moved through the City. Matthew uses a lot of Old Testament scriptures in these verses from Zechariah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the Psalms. A sense of the divine, of prophecies being fulfilled—hangs heavy in the air in our story from Matthew. What the people waving their palms saw was an ordinary man from nowhere, riding on a humble beast of burden—the donkey—into the City of Jerusalem.

The only reason to believe that Matthew was right to pepper this mundane and ordinary story with scripture is that if your faith helps you to see what many of the onlookers that day missed: namely, **GOD-in-the-skin-of-a-real-man-with-a-real-name—Jesus—and he was riding on a donkey before their eyes!**

After these 40 days of Lenten travel that we’ve been on—we now arrive at a day that seems to be surprisingly and inevitable. The Palm Sunday parade has color and spectacle, cheering and singing, happy and festive voices and a joyful exuberance filled with high spirits!

What lies ahead this week?

Maundy Thursday Communion:

6:00PM Stew Supper

7:00PM Holy Communion led by Board Members

Good Friday with UCC Judd & TFCCCH

10:00AM Walking our 8' Cross

12 Noon Joint Good Friday Service

DOING THE WORD OF GOD

So on this Palm Sunday, what is GOD's word for us?

1.ONE: LET US TRAVEL THIS WEEK WITH JESUS AS HE HEADS TO THE CROSS!

- ✓ Read your Bible again of the story in Matthew 21-27:54!
- ✓ Be in prayer alone or with others!
- ✓ If you are able come to the Thursday evening Maundy Thursday service in the MPR.
- ✓ If you are able come to the Good Friday:
 - 10AM Walk the Cross around the Makiki neighborhood!
 - And/or come to the 12 Noon Joint Service with United Church of Christ with Randy Reynoso (Youth Pastor) and some of the congregation.
- ✓ Let us walk the path of Jesus this week!

2.TWO: JESUS' DEATH DEMONSTRATES THAT GOD ALREADY DOES LOVE US!

- ✓ This is Jesus, the one we proclaim each week in worship as Messiah and Lord—the source of

hope and healing for us and our families and sisters and brothers of TFCCCH!

- ✓ This is Jesus—the paradigm of GOD’ action in the world—whose story comes to us again in a climax this week in order that our story might begin anew and afresh with the hope and promise of a good ending!

3.THREE: GOD NEVER WILL DESERT US!

- ✓ Trust GOD’s presence around you!
- ✓ GOD hears our laments, our cries and our praises—so talk to GOD all the time!
- ✓ GOD’s Spirit lives in you—so learn and embrace and share!
- ✓ Let us open our eyes to our neighborhoods, our work places, our schools, and place we socialize around town—for that’s our mission to be GOD’s presence everywhere!
- ✓ Let us be the presence of our GOD-who-is-always with us to others around us!

SENDING IN THE WORD OF GOD

Today’s Palm Sunday reflects for us the triumph of a different kind of power—a humble teacher on a donkey—a symbol of peace and reconciliation. Caught up in the moment—the crowd of people can’t fully understand the countercultural spectacle they are witnessing. They witness a GOD who has no enemies, makes no threats, destroys no cities, and damns no believers!

Such an amazing approach to life:

- ✓ What would happen if love won the day?

- ✓ What would happen if people rose up in love and aloha—rather than fear?
- ✓ What if our leaders embraced wonder rather than worry and embraced a new spiritual vision!

Palm Sunday is the prelude: it anticipates another kind of celebration—the resurrection of the Crucified One and an Empty Tomb and an Open Future for all GOD's people!

So go out today and shout, "Hosanna!" Shout "hosanna" to each other when you leave worship this morning! Christ is indeed alive and invites us to sing songs of praise in the tragic beauty of our own lives!

Amen? Amen!