

**Palm Sunday**  
**“Silent Stones Shouting”**  
**April 14, 2019**  
**New Philadelphia Moravian Church**

Today is an important day for Christians around the world. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week and reminds us that Easter is only a week away. Today is also an important day in the life of our church. At our 11:10 service we will be celebrating the confirmation of 8 amazing young people and even the baptism of one equally amazing young person. And of course at both services we will sing the *Hosanna* anthem which is always a highlight. I remember when I was leading our Wednesday night Lent program and we were talking about anticipating Holy Week and one of the things that everyone agreed upon was that it just wouldn't be Palm Sunday without singing *Hosanna*. So don't worry, we are getting ready to do just that.

I realized this week that it may seem strange for some that we are celebrating on Palm Sunday. As I was going over all that was happening in today's service with Larry, so that he would know what to expect for today, he pointed out that it was a little unusual that we see Palm Sunday as a joyful day. Because for many Christians, Palm Sunday is a more somber day.

For those of us who are long time Moravians, we have always known Palm Sunday as a day of great rejoicing and celebration. It's why we pray our wonderful liturgy "Sing O heaven and be joyful O earth!" and sing the beautiful *Hosanna*. We are greeting the arrival of the one who comes in the name of the Lord, of the one who comes to bring us salvation. So why shouldn't we celebrate?

Yet, as we really think about it, while today is a day of celebration, it is a celebration that has just below its surface a sense of melancholy, a tinge of sadness and sorrow. For we know what is going to happen. We acknowledge as we sing *Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die*. We know that even as we celebrate, our joy is going to turn to sorrow, Christ's triumph will become tragedy. The same crowds that shout *Hosanna* will soon be crying *Crucify him! Crucify him!*

But that comes later, at least in the Moravian Church. For we will be gathering every night this week and experiencing everything that Jesus experienced during the last week of his earthly life. We will get to the sorrow and tragedy, the cross and death. But those are for another day. At least, as I said, in the Moravian Church.

However, in many (if not most) other churches, they don't get together every night during Holy Week. They don't have the opportunity to experience everything that Jesus experienced during the last week of his earthly life. So they have to get to it all on Palm Sunday, so that Easter will be appropriately joyful and celebratory. For them, Palm Sunday is a more somber day, encompassing all the Jesus experienced from his triumphal entry to the Last Supper to his betrayal and arrest to his trial and crucifixion and death. But not us, we get to take it one day at a time. So today is about the joy and celebration of our salvation coming in the name of the Lord!

It's a familiar story. Jesus and the disciples have arrived just outside of Jerusalem, near Bethany on the Mount of Olives. It is here that Jesus puts his plan into motion. Everything that happened on Palm Sunday was carefully planned for and arranged by Jesus. He knew exactly what he wanted to happen and he made sure that it would. He began by sending two of his disciples to go and find a colt for him to ride on and to bring it to him. Jesus even told them what they were to say if anyone questions them. "The Lord needs it." This was his prearranged code so that the people who owned the colt would allow Jesus to take it.

They take the colt to Jesus and he uses it to ride down the Mount of Olives and into Jerusalem. This creates a powerful image. Most kings or military leaders would enter riding on a mighty steed rather than a humble colt. And it also serves to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.           Zechariah 9:9

The crowd recognizes Jesus as a king coming in triumph, despite his mode of transportation. They cut palm branches and wave them in the air and lay them down on the road along with their cloaks to mark his path into the city. They shout out songs of praise with loud voices *Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*

Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem. The long awaited Messiah has come. Salvation is here. And every little thing is going to be alright. And that's what Palm Sunday is all about. It's why today is a great day of rejoicing and celebrating. It's why we sing *Hosanna* and wave palm branches. For Jesus is our Messiah. He is our Savior. He is coming in the name of the Lord to save us.

However, if you were paying really close attention to the Scripture reading from Luke that we just heard, you may have noticed that the story we read isn't quite the same as the familiar Palm Sunday story that we all know. There were a couple of important things missing. Let's see who noticed what isn't in Luke's version of Jesus' triumphal entry...

That's right. There are NO palms on Palm Sunday. And there are no shouts of *Hosanna!* So maybe, in the interest of Biblical accuracy—at least in the interest of being true to today's Scripture—maybe we should have someone come and gather up all those nice palm crosses that many of you are wearing. And maybe we should sing a different hymn at the end of our service and ditch the Hosanna anthem.

Maybe instead everyone should take off their cloaks and spread them out on the aisles of the sanctuary. And maybe we should pass out stones to everyone. Kind of like this one (HOLD UP ROCK) For one thing that Luke does have is stones. He has Jesus telling the Pharisees, who want him to order his disciples to be quiet, that even if they were to stop shouting and singing, if they were silent “the stones would shout out.”

So maybe that is how we should celebrate Palm Sunday. At least in the years where Luke is our gospel reading. It would certainly be interesting. But it doesn't look like many people here are wearing cloaks. Actually Larry and I may be wearing the closest things to cloaks with our preaching robes. And I don't think that we have enough rocks to give to everyone. And I know that I REALLY want to sing *Hosanna* and I feel certain that all of you do too. So let's just stick with doing Palm Sunday the way that we are used to doing it. Let's keep our palms and let's sing our *Hosanna*.

But let's not forget about those rocks, those stones that would sing out (SHOUT OUT) if the disciples were silent. Because I think it is the most important part of Luke's version of the Palm Sunday story. The day of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem was not only a

day of great rejoicing for the people who were there, for the people who had been longing and waiting and hoping a praying for a Messiah; it is not only a day of great joy for us who know that Jesus is our Savior; but it is a day of great rejoicing for ALL of creation.

As Paul wrote to the Colossians:

*Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Through Jesus, God redeems and reconciles all things to himself. He joins together heaven and earth, the divine and the human as he brings salvation to all of God's creation. And those who know Jesus know this and can't help but proclaim it.

The first time Jesus made his triumphal entry, it was proclaimed solely by the heavens as a multitude of angels sing: "*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those he favors.*" when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The second triumphal entry of Jesus was proclaimed on earth as the whole multitude of his disciples said: "*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!*" when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

*Sing O heaven, and be joyful O earth for the glory of the Lord shall be revealed!* The glory of the Lord is Jesus and he has come to save us and to save all the world. We can't help but sing and shout our praises to him and for him! We can't be silent when God comes to us. And he doesn't come to call us to account, or to condemn us, or to chastise us, but he comes to bring us salvation, to reconcile us and all creation to God.

We can't be silent in the face of God's great glory that is seen in 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.*

When we think about who Jesus is and what he has done for us, we can't be silent. For if we are, if we are silent and fail to sing praises to God, if we fail to proclaim the glory of God that has been revealed in Christ Jesus, then someone else will do it for us. Then these silent stones will shout out.

And I don't think that we should let that happen. For God sent us Jesus to save us and *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.*

Yet when I look around this world, I don't see every knee bending, I don't hear every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. So we cannot remain silent in the face of the glory of God as it is being revealed to us and among us. I don't think we should allow these stones to do what we are called to do. We've got a lot of work left to do. So let us keep on singing and shouting praises to God. Let us keep on crying *Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!* until our work is done. Until that day comes when every knee bends before him and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord.

In fact, we are getting ready to do so right now. We are getting ready to do what we do every Palm Sunday, no matter what Luke's gospel says, we are getting ready to sing *Hosanna!* But first we need to set the stage a little more. We need to prepare the way of the Lord. And we need more palms and we need more cloaks. So I need some volunteers. Don't worry if you aren't wearing a cloak. We actually have plenty. And we have plenty of palms. But I need some people to come up and help lay them out on the aisles of our Sanctuary so that we can see and remember and know what it was like when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

So we can sing Hosanna and keep on shouting our praises until that day that every knee bends and EVERY tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. It is time for us to be the multitude that welcomes Jesus, not just into Jerusalem, but into New Philadelphia, into Winston-Salem, into North Carolina, into the United States, into the entire world.

Hosanna, blessed is he that comes in the name of Lord! Hosanna in the highest!  
Let us let these silent stones SHOUT!