

"Glorious"

Matthew 21:1-11 & 26:14-35

April 17, 2011

Earlier this week as I thought about what our worship time was going to be like today the word that came to mind was 'glorious'. I loved the thought of the children marching in and being joined by the choir. I knew that the music was going to be uplifting from the opening sounds of "Ho, Ho, Ho, Hosanna" with the kids playing their musical instruments right down to the last note of the closing hymn - one of the great hymns that we unfortunately only seem to bring out on Palm Sunday, "All Glory, Laud, and Honor". Yah, in my mind, 'glorious' is a good word.

Unfortunately, my immediate reaction when that came to mind was - who uses words like that. I don't even know any more what the word on the street is. I have listened and know that there are a lot of words being said that I can not understand. I suspect that every generation has had a language all their own. But 'glorious'? - Who says that?

I suppose that it is sort of like 'Hosanna'. Now there is a real interesting word. It is the kind of word that would have a very limited circle of users in our world Probably even much more limited than the word 'glorious.' Hosanna would certainly be limited in use to a certain segment of the church going population and then just on one day of the year. According to the dictionary definition [Hosanna is an exclamation, a biblical cry of praise or joy that comes from a Hebrew phrase meaning 'save us, we pray'](#). It sounds like it should be a good word. But who would say that? Maybe in Biblical time it was a word in general use ... I don't know. But I sure know that it is a word that is not one that we tend to use in our world - it is not fashionable - people would think you were weird if you went around saying it out side of the Church on Palm Sunday. Even the religious leaders of the day thought that Jesus should get His followers to stop saying it. Jesus said no But the people said, OK!

OK let's stop asking Jesus to save us. OK let's stop praising Jesus. OK let's forget about finding joy in Jesus and look somewhere else. That has always been a part of our nature. When Jesus was saying all of the right things early in His ministry and there were miracles and healing to observe ... Everyone was all for Jesus. He was the man of the hour and everyone ran in His direction. But then the things He had to say did not sound so great And people began to run in other directions ... Any direction so long as it was away from Jesus. The band of followers was smaller by the time Jesus came riding into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey ... Smaller but still exuberant enough to get the attention of those who were nearby. But before the week was out it seemed as though everyone was running the other direction. And even the closest followers who were adamant about their faithfulness They would never run or be unfaithful But there they were, looking the other direction and saying - 'nope, don't even know the guy'.

This part of the story always amazes me. Here we are at the beginning of Holy Week - gathered to celebrate what we call the "Triumphal Entry" of Jesus among the shouts of Hosanna and palm branches waving. And if you skip midweek worship [like on Friday Evening - who goes to church on Friday night?] the next worship will be the celebration of Easter. These are two of the really big days in the church They are celebration They are glorious. But in between everything falls apart Hosannas are replaced with shouts of Crucify Him Palm branches give way to a crown of thorns And the donkey is gone - Jesus Himself becoming the beast of burden carrying the cross.

I ponder the change and wonder why we can not continue to think in terms of 'glorious' and use words like 'hosanna' when talking about Jesus? Why do we turn on Jesus and go our own way?

Growing up we had milk cows and cattle in the pasture out at our farm. We knew how cattle were and I remember having a picture hanging in the house for a time that pictured 4 cows - each in a different pasture. The barbed wire fences separating the pastures crossed in the middle of the picture with one cow visible in each section of pasture. The great thing about the picture was that each cow was stretching through the fence to eat the grass in the next pasture. It think of that picture as I wonder why we turn away from Jesus so easily. Are we enthralled by the lush green grass only as long as we don't look across the fence? Are we so concerned with feeding ourselves, taking care of number one, getting what we can for ourselves that we fail to see what we have already been given?

Jesus comes into the city of Jerusalem acknowledged by the people as the one who has come to save them. But before the end of the week many have turned away and Judas is off at a private meeting, stretching his neck through the fence, asking the question, "What will you give me to betray Jesus to you?" Is it true that it is always greener on the other side?

Who is this one that we have welcomed with shouts of Hosanna? I suspect that most of us in this room have at one time gone through confirmation classes and then the Rite of Confirmation proclaiming to family, friends, the church and to God that we choose to put our faith in Jesus. I think often of one confirmation student that stood before her congregation and announced her faith in God saying that she would always be faithful and would be in worship every Sunday unless she was on her death bed. A couple of weeks later another member of the church stopped me after worship and asked if we should send flowers to that student. and I think of a news report recently that told of the country of France proposing legislation to ban certain religious garments ... the report said that it made sense because the country was now largely a non-religious / secular country - - a whole country. Who is this one that we gather to worship on this day with that strange word, Hosanna? Is Jesus just another 'flash in the pan' - something exciting for a moment in our lives - excitement that soon wanes and passes altogether?

And so with the warmth of that exciting triumphal entry still ringing in His ears, Jesus gathers around a table with His closest followers. They remember the mighty acts of God that have given them a promised land and a freedom that we can not humanly comprehend. And then Jesus acknowledges to them that He knows that there will be times

when they all turn away from Him. Some will betray some will deny Him. But He still takes the bread in His hands, gives thanks to God, breaks the bread as He thinks out loud. "This is my body, broken for you!" And it is given to the very ones who will run in fear - those who are more concerned with their own affairs - even those who would deliberately betray Him. "Take and eat." Broken, I will come to fill you. Let the grace of God feed you.

Glorious is really a pretty good work. Perhaps we should use it more often when we think about the love and gifts of God. Today we start that final journey ... from Hosanna to the cross ... and to the glorious empty tomb and eternal life secured for us.

AMEN