

Palm Sunday, Year B. The scripture text is taken from Mark 11:1-11

The story is told of high-school teacher, who was walking down the hallway of the high school, when he heard one of his students singing a song, it was a song he had just heard, just the day before.

The melody was good, but the words glorified violence and immorality, this song was about as bad as it gets.

So the teacher asks this student, "Do you know what you are even singing?" She had no idea, but the words of the song, she wasn't even paying attention to.

I think a similar thing happens in the church. People sing hymns. Sometimes they like the melodies. But really, I wonder how many people really know what they are singing.

It happened on Palm Sunday, many, many years ago, in a foreign land, that we sometimes wonder, how does this speak to us today?

People were singing a song as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. "Hosanna!" they said. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!" These people were shouting and singing. I wonder how many of them, knew this person they were singing to.

The word, "Hosanna" means, "Lord save us!" Were these people asking Jesus to save them? Yes, but not in a spiritual way.

You see, these people thought that Jesus was coming to save them from the Roman government. They thought this guy is a warrior, he is coming to send those hated Roman occupiers back to Rome.

Finally, someone had arrived, who will lead a rebellion against the Roman regime, that is oppressing us! He comes in the name of the Lord.

You see, the kingdom that they are looking forward to, was an earthly kingdom, freedom from the Roman invaders, these oppressors.

The people of Jesus' day, wanted Jesus to bring things back to the way they were when David was king. Hosanna in the highest to Jesus!

What the people of Jesus' day did not understand, what they were singing about, or who they were singing to.

These words fit Jesus, but not in a political way. Jesus was the Lord God Himself in the flesh, who had come to save them, and so the word, "Hosanna" works.

Jesus came into this world in the name of His heavenly Father, who had sent Him into this fallen and sinful world to fulfill a mission.

Jesus came into this world to establish His kingdom, not a physical, geographic location. Jesus came to establish spiritual peace, peace between you and God, peace that comes from having a clear conscience, peace in your heart, that is the kind of peace Jesus had to come establish.

These people who were hailing Jesus, had no clue, no idea, who Jesus really was or what He was going to do for them.

How do we know that? Look at how these same people treated Jesus just five days earlier, when He rode into Jerusalem on that donkey, and the five days later, instead of shouting, “Hosanna”, they were shouting, “Crucify Him”.

Instead of welcoming Him, they mocked Jesus’ claim to be king, as He hung dying on a Roman cross outside of Jerusalem on Gologtha’s hill.

I wonder what Jesus thought as He listened to all those people shouting, “Hosanna”, and most of them, really did not Him at all.

When these people eventually died, and met Jesus face to face, I wonder if He asked Him, “Why did you sing to me, and then mock me? Why did you sing to me, and then crucify me?”

I would venture to say, that there are many who go to church and sing hymns, but just like those people on Palm Sunday, many have no idea what they are singing.

How can we sing to Jesus Christ, from the hymn “Beautiful Savior” and sing these words: “Truly I’d love thee, truly I’d serve thee”, and then you go, and do the things you do during the week.

What does Christ think when He hears you say that love Him, and that you want to serve Him, but He sees how selfish you are?

Or, how about the times you pray to Him, usually when you are in trouble. Then He sees that you rarely come to church to worship Him.

Eventually, all of us who are still living, will one day, have to look Christ in the eye, after we pass from this world into the next.

What will He say to you? Will He say to you: Why did you sing to me, but never believed in me as Savior and Lord?

Why did you sing to me, but never bothered to get to know me? What will you say? Is this what your spiritual life looks like right now?

I want to share a story with about a man who wrote a hymn we are all familiar with. In fact, I believe it is one of the best known hymns, not only here in America, but throughout the church, world-wide.

The writer of this hymn, described in his early life, as an immoral wretch, who mocked Christianity. This young man was a sailor, and like many other sailors, he was very rough around the edges.

He was a heavy drinker, and at one point he was forced into Great Britain’s Navy. He tried to desert, but was caught, and punished.

He used to make disrespectful songs and about the ship’s captain, and prided himself in his creative use of profanity, and his sharp attacks on the Christian belief.

Even though on several occasions, he seemed to have been miraculously preserved, when he should have lost his life.

He refused to think about this God who seemed to be taking care of him. He continued to drink, to swear, and to mock God.

Eventually, he left the Royal Navy, and became the captain of his own ship, a slave trading ship. He had no interest in religion whatsoever, but deep down inside, there was something there.

In his younger years, his mother had exposed him to some religious instruction, and she prayed that one day, he would become a pastor.

Then a day came when his ship was caught in a horrendous storm out on the open sea, worse than any other storm, he had ever been in before.

He thought for sure his ship was going to be torn to pieces and sink with the loss of life, of all those aboard. In desperation, he prayed to the God, he had been mocking all of his life.

Well, amazingly, the ship stayed together, and stayed afloat. That moment jolted him, into learning more about Jesus Christ.

This ship captain, learned that Jesus had come into this world to live as a real person, that Jesus sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world, including his sins as well.

All of that profanity, all of that mockery, all of that immorality, all of that drunkenness, all of his sins, Christ took them to the cross, and paid for them, in full.

This ship captain, had discovered the grace of God. That God would forgive him for every sin he had ever committed, even the sin of mocking Him, that was grace, undeserved.

Eventually, this ship captain left the slave trading business, and over a period of time, he became a pastor.

During his ministry, this former slave ship captain, wrote the words to this famous and well loved hymn; "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see."

Pastor John Newton wrote those words as he looked back upon his life, and how God's amazing grace had brought him safe thus far.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I hope that you can see yourself in this hymn. You and I, all of us are truly a "wretch" in the eyes of God, because of your sin, my sin.

But by the grace of God, through the blood-stained cross you are forgiven, and through the empty tomb of the resurrection, you are cared for, and you have a place waiting for you in heaven.

Like John Newton, you can also say: "I am a great sinner, Christ is a great Savior."

Let this day, be the last day, you ever sing a hymn to God, and have no idea as to who you are singing to.

Let this day, be the day that you begin your journey of getting to know this God, through His Holy Word, His sacraments, and to walk closer to Him by faith, who has shown to you, His amazing grace.

Let us pray: Loving God, on this Palm Sunday as we move into Holy Week, we celebrate our Lord and Savior's triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem. Let us lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving, to Christ Jesus, as He prepares to suffer and to die for our sins, and sins of the world. Let us reflect upon the grace that has been shown to us, through Christ Jesus our Lord. All these things, we humbly pray, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.