

“Who Is This?”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Palm Sunday, April 13, 2014

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29 Matthew 21: 8-11

Psalm 118

A Song of Victory

1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

2 Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,

that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

20 This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. **22**The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. **23**This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. **24**This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. **25** Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

27 The Lord is God, and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

29 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Matthew 21: 8-11

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

'Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?'

The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Litany of the Palms *

*Adapted from an original litany created by the Rev. George E. Calvert (1928-2005) while serving as Pastor of Church of the Son of Man and then Church of the Living Hope, East Harlem, NY.

(Please stand if you are able, hold high your palm branches, and repeat after me.)

Hosanna!

Hosanna!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

God save us!

Hosanna!

In Christ we are united!

Christ comes for all people!

All ages!

All races!

All creeds!

All classes!

All nations!

The rich!

The poor!

The gays!

The straight!

Men, women, and children!

All people, united in Christ!

Hosanna!

God save us!

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

Amen!

Sermon

Who is this?

In the Gospel According to Matthew,

we get an on-the-street report of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road,
and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
The crowds that went ahead of him
and that followed
were shouting, *'Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'*

When he entered Jerusalem,
the whole city was in turmoil, asking, *'Who is this?'*
The crowds were saying,
'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Who is this?

The whole city was in turmoil.

Neighbors stopped neighbors in the street, in the temple,
and in the marketplace,

asking, *"Who is this? Who has entered into our calm city*

and caused such an uproar, such a resounding joy?"

In this brief scenario we are introduced to a delightful theological insight:

Every living soul receives and identifies Jesus Christ differently

depending on where they are in life,

and that is okay, because Jesus loves us, every one.

And because Jesus is taking the long view.

God is patient.

God is gracious.

God will wait and gently nurture us

into fuller understandings and a deeper appreciation
of who this is

who laid down his life for us

so that we might be forgiven and have
life everlasting.

In contrast, we have this very modern tendency to expect
that

what I think is what you should think;

what one person believes is what someone else
should believe.

If you want you can take this line of reasoning to the nth
degree,

Jim Wallis points out that our cultural tendency is to
act like,

“I am right, and you are evil.”

Who is this?

Ever get a tune or a line from a song stuck in your head?

Usually we will do anything and everything to be free.

So, all week I've been humming the refrain from "To God Be the Glory".

"O come to the Father through Jesus the Son

And give Him the glory, great things He has done!"

I have not tried to be free since the refrain works for me,

To God Be the Glory speaks to me

of how I encountered and then claimed Jesus as my
Lord and Savior,

identifying Him as the Son of the Living God

when I was 18 and in trouble,

and His grace and His church
pulled me through.

However, the joy and the challenge for the Church and the
city in turmoil

is that for every soul on earth and in heaven

there is a unique and personal encounter with
God...

and no two testimonials are alike!

This is made remarkably clear and vivid in today's Holy
Scriptures.

Today's story of the turmoil and triumph and tragedy in Jerusalem speaks to this.

Jesus was welcomed and recognized
and given many different titles and names,
seemingly as many names as there are souls in
the city.

Some called him the One who comes in the name of the Lord, as a man of God.

Others referred to him as the Son of David, which implied Jesus was the Messiah.

Still others received him as a prophet, as a truth speaker and truth seeker.

Let's be clear: no one here is wrong.

Every single soul is identifying God as best as they can,
based on their own experience.

Not my experience or someone else's

or some "high falluting" character who thinks he or she knows best.

Through each one's experience of the holy each one answers the question...

Who is this?

You know, before they drew near to Jerusalem

Jesus asked his followers whom others said he was (see Matthew 16).

A prophet!

John the Baptist!

Jeremiah or Elijah, risen from the dead!

Then Jesus asked them, *"Who do you say that I am?"*

Peter said, *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."*

This same personal identification of who this is appears twice more in Matthew.

At his trial the high priest said to Jesus:

"I put you under oath before the living God; tell us if you are the Messiah."

Jesus answered, *"You have said so."*

This is akin to Jesus saying, *"You got it! You got that right! Amen!"* (Matt. 26: 63-64)

And one more, only it happened at the cross on Calvary.

After Jesus breathed his last

the earth shook, rocks split, and the curtain in the temple was torn in two.

Then the Centurion and those who were with him said,

“Truly this man was the Son of God.” (Matt. 27: 50-54)

Who is this?

Peter and the high priest and those who bear witness to his death

identify Jesus as the Son of God.

Yet so many, so many were not spiritually there yet

at the time of this story being told.

The Good News is that Jesus loves us, no matter where we are spiritually.

Regardless of how we identify Jesus in our lives, He identifies us,

and He identifies with us.

Do you identify with Him?

Who is this?

A woman approached Jesus

and didn't dare speak aloud or call on the name of the Lord;

she simply touched the hem of his coat,

and the power of love transformed her life.

Who is this?

Another beautiful soul went to the town well at the noon hour

when no one would be around, when no one would bother her,

and a man from Galilee gave her Living Water.

She ran to town and told folks about a man "who told me everything I have ever done."

Who is this?

A troubled man in Gerasene whose whole life was in turmoil approached Jesus.

The man could not identify Jesus;

his inner demons did, however, calling him, "*Jesus, the Son of the Most High.*"

Evil knows true power;

unconditional love is more powerful than sin and death.

Who is this?

In Search of Myself, author Davies says, "*I found myself in finding God.*"

*What I was searching for was my own identity,
and without knowing it
my search was for God."*

Find yourself in finding God.

No matter what you name Him or how you come to claim Him,

Jesus is already looking for you, finding you and claiming you for God.

The Good News is that Jesus Christ will reveal Himself to you,

surely, faithfully, completely,

whether gradually or all at once,

whether in the everyday, in the still of
the night,

in the joy of a parade or the
mercy of a protest march.

In the turmoil and the trials of life and love, work and play,

we connect through our own experience

who He is.

Who is this?

Who do you say that He is?

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit. Amen!*