

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Palm Sunday, April 9, 2017
Rev. Andrew Reid
Psalm 118:1-2,19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 21:1-11

Homily – Palm Sunday

Once upon a time, long, long ago, long before any of us were born, long before even Jesus was born, people in the city of Jerusalem used to do a lovely thing. People used to come from countries all around to Jerusalem for one of the big religious celebrations. And when they did, the people who lived there would go out to welcome them. They would line the streets, and they would cheer and sing, and they would make the visitors feel welcome to their city.

And the people who were coming to Jerusalem would join in. They would cheer and sing too. They were to worship God in the Temple, so they would sing songs that talked about going up to the house of God, and how happy they were to be there, and how wonderful it was to join with all the other people who had come to pray and to praise God for all that God had done for them.

You have to remember that this was long before people travelled around in cars and buses and trains and aeroplanes. People got around by walking, or if they were fortunate and have enough money or were important enough, they might ride on a horse. But if you rode on a horse, it was because you were one of the really important people, like a king, or a ruler, or a general leading an army. It was a sign that you were coming to take charge of things, and people had better look watch out.

Most people simply walked from place to place, which meant that it took a long time to get anywhere. And a few people rode on donkeys. But if you rode on a donkey, it was usually a sign that you were not coming to

be in charge. You were coming as a guest, quietly and peacefully.

But no matter how you came, if you were coming for one of the big religious celebrations, the people of Jerusalem would come out to welcome you. And as part of their welcome, they would cut down palm branches, and wave them in the air, and lay them on the ground like a carpet, and cheer and sing, and make you feel welcome to their city.

And that is what they did when Jesus came into Jerusalem. We know how special Jesus was, and how special he still is to us today. And the people who were with Jesus knew how special he was. But most of the people in Jerusalem didn't. But they still welcomed him with cheers and songs and palm branches. Just as we did this morning, and just as we will do all through this service.

I have a challenge for you. How many times can you find the word Hosanna in today's bulletin? Here's a tip: it's hidden a few places where you might not expect to find it.

Homily – Holy Week

Today, we think about Palm Sunday. We sing hosanna, and wave palms, and remember the story of Jesus coming into Jerusalem. But some people are thinking about something else today, something that doesn't have anything to do with Palm Sunday.

100 years ago just now, a terrible war was raging in Europe. And even though it was in Europe, many Canadian soldiers went to fight. And exactly 100 years ago today, though it wasn't Palm Sunday but Easter Monday, one of the most important and most terrible battles of that war began: the Battle of Vimy Ridge, in France. The battle was actually planned to start the day before, but the French generals didn't want to start fighting on Easter Day, so it was put back one day. Almost 100,000

Canadian soldiers fought in the battle, which lasted three days. 3,598 Canadian soldiers were killed and another 7,004 wounded. Four members of the Canadian Corps were awarded the received Victoria Cross, the highest medal for bravery that there is.

Many people believe that the Battle of Vimy Ridge was one of the most important events in Canadian history. They believe that that was when Canada and Canadians started to see themselves as an independent nation, able to stand on its own. And right now, Canadians are at Vimy for a special event to remember what happened there and to honour the soldiers who fought and died. Two young people from New St James are there: Ryan Aziz and Mackenzie Vickers.

War is a terrible thing, and we should always try to avoid having to go to war. But war can also be a time when people show great courage, and self-sacrifice, and determination. It can be a time when people are prepared to risk their lives for their country and what they believe in. It is a time when people are willing to die for what they believe in, and so that others can live better lives, in freedom and peace.

Today is Palm Sunday. Today is also the start of Holy Week. Later this week, on Maundy Thursday and on Good Friday, we will remember Jesus' courage, and self-sacrifice, and determination. We will remember what he was willing to do so that we can live the life that God wants us all to live. We will remember what he did so that we might have eternal life in God's kingdom that starts here and now and continues forever.

Let's never forget that.