

## "AMATEURS, EXPERTS AND PALM SUNDAY"

TEXT: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner".

(Luke 20: 17)

### INTRODUCTION

"Take the bus and leave the driving to us". That Greyhound commercial of recent years might well serve as the motto of the "expert - oriented" society. Trust us and we'll take the tension out of driving for you. Simply, step on board, pay your fare, sit back, relax. We'll get you there! You and I live in this "expert-oriented" society. "My broker is E. F. Hutton. When E. F. Hutton talks, everybody listens." Don't worry about your investments. Let the experts at E. F. Hutton handle them.

It's not my intent to belittle the experts; goodness knows, we all rely on them. The only thing is that the experts can be wrong. They make mistakes. Remember the Edsel. Remember the pollsters who had Dewey beating Truman in a landslide. Remember how the critics treated ~~Camelot~~ when it opened.

### AMATEURS AND EXPERTS AND PALM SUNDAY

Now a close reading of the drama of Holy Week reveals a throbbing tension between the religious experts in the temple of Jerusalem and the amateurs who were in the streets cheering as Jesus rode by on a donkey. The experts and the amateurs confronted each other that week long ago and you know how it ended. what happened, and how..

Throughout most of the ministry of Jesus this tension seemed to exist that at one point He was moved to pray:

"I thank Thee, Father, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for such was Thy gracious will"

(Matthew 11: 25)

Generally speaking, it was the common people (the amateurs, the non-professionals) who heard Jesus gladly. We read in Luke's Gospel, chapter 19, verses 47 and 48:

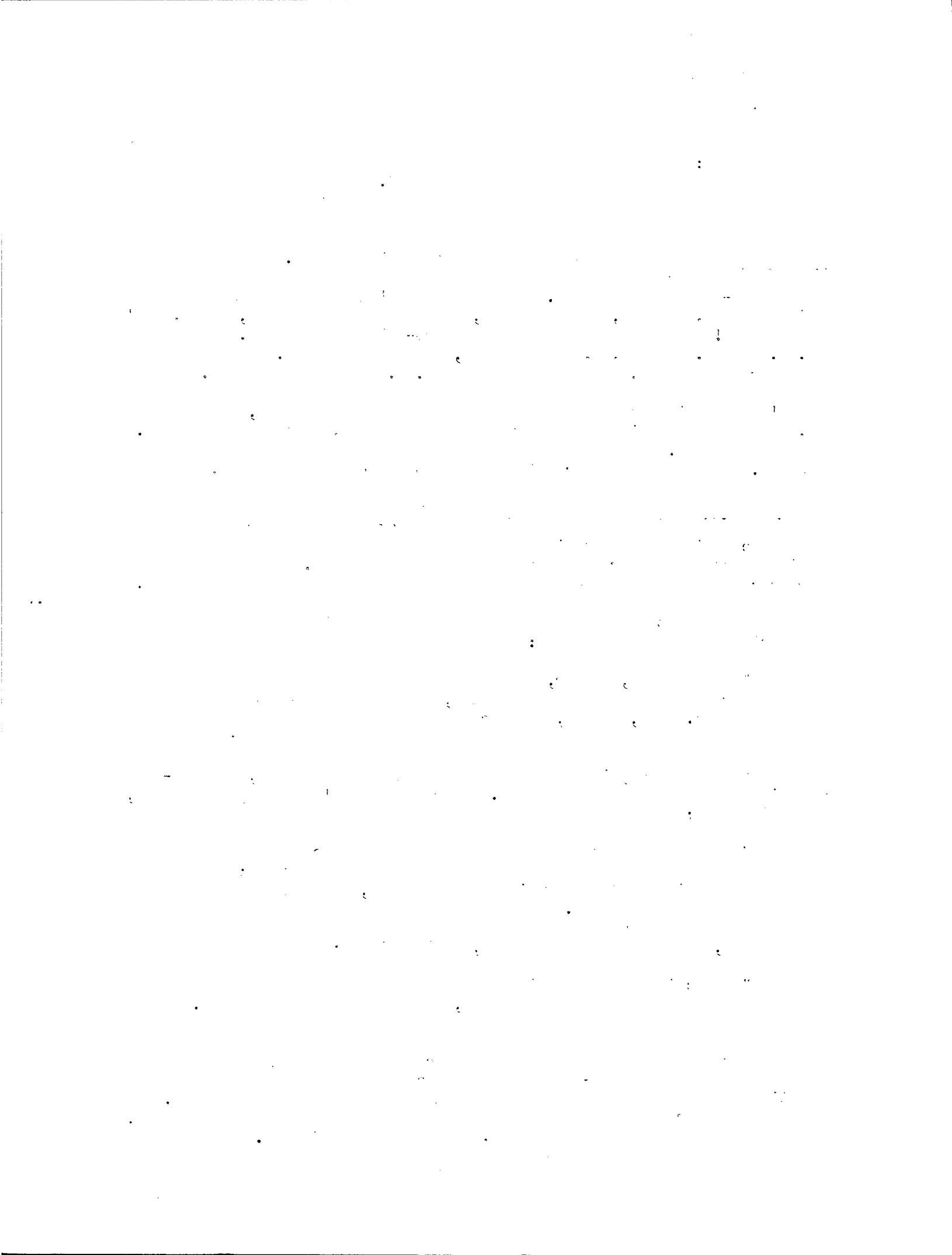
"That the chief priests and the Scribes and the principal men of the people (the experts) sought to destroy Him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people hung on His words".

Or again, in the following chapter, it is written:

"The Scribes and the Chief Priests (the experts) tried to lay hands on Him at that very hour, but they feared the people."

(Luke 20: 15)

It is true that several days later the crowd that hailed Him on Palm Sunday was to shout "crucify Him" - but this only because the people had been massaged and manipulated by the authorities and infiltrated by paid demonstrators. The fact of the matter is that the religious amateurs of His day warmed to Jesus. ~~For the most part He left the experts cold.~~ The experts did not.



THE AMATEURS

I do not wish to idealize the Populist mind. They were not angels. They were not saints. They were not seers. But they did detect a quality of love in the actions of Jesus and a quality of truth in His words that they had not known or felt before.

We read in the Palm Sunday story that "many spread their garments on the road". It's a beautiful picture of the self-forgetfulness caused by a great enthusiasm. There was no debate about it; no cautious trial balance to see whether or not the risk to their clothing was really called for; no wondering if some show of respect at a cheaper price might not be enough.

*Good!*  
These people were lifted on a tide of hope and of joy and of love. Spontaneous enthusiasm is like a flood tide. Life has nothing to match it for exhilaration and zest. The poet who cried, "Take all away from me, but give me ecstasy" had a good sense of values. The life that never forgets itself in a great lift of devotion is poor, no matter how richly upholstered its furniture.

More than that, such spontaneous, self-erasing enthusiasm is indispensable to the work of Christianity in the world. "Many spread their garments on the road". Do we ever spread anything costly before Him? A maximum offering of mind, of heart, of skill, of talent - without any bookkeeping prudence to determine whether or not a minimum might be enough to put before Him?

THE EXPERTS

When then of the experts? The professionals in the musty back rooms of the Temple? Ironically, they ended up missing the glory that was passing by. And to describe and to heighten this drastic failure to join His parade, Jesus alluded to a legend in Jewish history - a legend referred to in the 118th Psalm and in several places in the New Testament.

The story has to do with the rearing of Solomon's Temple. All of the heavy hammering for that building was done away from the temple site. As First Kings, chapter six puts it:

"The house when it was in building was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building."

Their concern for noise pollution was most commendable; it must have been one of the quietest construction jobs in history, but as the story has it, there was one stone that kept getting in the way of the builders.

They would stumble over it again and again. They knew where all the other stones were to go and how they were to fit together, but this particular stone was something of a mis-fit - a nuisance. And so, they carted it off away from the construction site. Eventually, however, when they needed the KEYSTONE for the great arch, it was to that discarded stone they had to turn. Hence, the words of Jesus which provide this Palm Sunday message with a text:

"The very stone" said Jesus, "which the builders (the experts) rejected has become the head of the corner."

Now, according to the dictionary, a keystone is that "wedge-shaped" piece at the summit of the arch that is regarded as holding all other pieces together. This

was the piece that the builders blew, the piece they carelessly discarded. Jesus saw Himself as that "keystone" - that part or piece holding all other parts and pieces together...and indeed, He was and is!

THIS TENSION The experts blew it for before the day was over they were planning how to get rid of Him and this throbbing tension between the experts and the amateurs underlying the events of Holy Week can also be felt at times in our time. It surfaces whenever there is tension between the establishment and the enthusiasts. Our text reminds us that the religious establishment at times can end up being counter-productive, stifling the very faith it is meant to foster, to mediate, to share with the people. It can so easily slip into the temptation of seeing itself as "end" rather than "means".

I recall it was John Mackay who use to speak of ORDER and ARDOR struggling for domination in the life of the Church. To often, I fear, we have erred on the side of order to the neglect of ardor. Ardor becomes the people of God, the followers of Christ.

Halford Luccock who use to teach seminarians at Yale Divinity School with whimsy and point put it this way:

"I was impressed several years ago that Eugene Ormandy dislocated a shoulder while leading the Philadelphia Orchestra. I do not know what they were playing...certainly not Mozart, perhaps Stravinsky. But at any rate, he was giving all of himself to it. And I asked myself sadly, 'Did I ever dislocate anything...even a necktie for Jesus?'"

BACK TO PALM SUNDAY Back to that Palm Sunday scene...that scene of self-forgetfulness caused by enthusiasm and ardor. Yes, it was a day when the wild enthusiasm of the people bumped up against the cautious religious experts. The crowd that day was joyous and right. They had glimpsed what the experts failed to see.

"And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying 'Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!'"

Notice the punctuation. It's an exclamation point. It's the only possible punctuation for a word of praise like this. Hosanna! Jesus, recall, was often greeted with question marks. Remember John the Baptist's question, "Are You He who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Pilate, "So You are a King?" And the world has had its millions of question marks about Jesus: is He really the way?

Eve Currie expressed it sadly. She wrote that as she looked back on Jerusalem she was tempted to say to Jesus, whose teaching was so "tremendously powerful and yet so powerless",

"You told us to be kind and forgiving, but, for twenty solid centuries, wretched, incorrigible men have gone on being merciless, full of violence and hatred. Religious men and atheists alike have lived and ruled in a non-Christian way - and look at us now: we've never been in a worse mess".

Here at the gates of Jerusalem were exclamation points. No question marks. I believe that one of the greatest journeys anyone can ever make is that journey from a question mark about Jesus to an exclamation point about Him, from a question mark about life to an exclamation point about it. And that journey can never be made by thought alone. It must be made by action., embracing decision.

When we follow Him and march in His procession, when we do the things that He would have us do, our punctuation marks change. It is no longer a question of "Are You?" - but rather "Hosanna". Or, as some today might put it, "Amen" and "Amen". "Praise the Lord".

THE CHALLENGE OF PALM SUNDAY

I've always liked Palm Sunday. It's one of my favorite Sundays across the year. I always look forward to it. I like it because it shows Jesus in action, on the move, in His insurgency, calling to the people for a decision. ~~It is a day of decision.~~ And, in spite of rejection after rejection across the centuries, He still comes to us...probing our consciences, haunting our dreams, stimulating our spirits, challenging our hopes. This is how Jesus is always known to us - as One who comes and "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord".

There may be those present who wonder, can I still join His parade. The answer is - of course you can! You can join His parade today. ~~What are you waiting for?~~ Let's join His parade, march with Him, take up the cry of the people in a way appropriate to our King, King of Kings, the King of all the human race. "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

Let's walk  
with Him,

He comes - opposing all forms of violence, classism, sexism, - spiritual, psychological and physical violence. Let those hosannas ring and ride on, ride on King Jesus - into our world, into our nation, into our city - yes, into our hearts this day. James Russell Lowell put it so well when he wrote:

"Once to every man and nation comes that  
moment to decide,  
In the strife of truth with flasehood,  
for the good or evil side....

And the choice goes by forever, twixt  
that darkness and that light"

PRAYER

Move in our hearts, Lord Jesus, confirming the decisions and the resolutions of this day and this hour of worship. We ask for your mercy, O God, for all those sectors in our lives that we have yet to bring under your control. Help us to love what is good, right and true - for we would both desire and do your will. Remembering Jesus and how on this Sunday long ago He put it all together....we ask this in His name that He may walk with us through the days and hours of this Holy Week. Amen.

Please announce at your Services this weekend:

In the event of a transit strike, many of your elderly neighbors may need help which is ordinarily provided by people who come into Manhattan from Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. We are asking that if you are able to provide any time to assist with delivery of meals, or cooking, or shopping, please speak to \_\_\_\_\_ at the end of the service.

\* \* \* \* \*

NOTE to Clergy and/or Designated Person:

The enclosed forms can be used to collect names of volunteers. Completed forms should be delivered to The Yorkville Volunteer Center, 356 East 88th Street, on Monday, March 31st, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. The Center is serving as a clearing house for requests for volunteer help from the following agencies:

Burden Center for the Aging; Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association - SCOPE Program; NYC-Dept. of General Social Services; Search and Care; Stanley Isaacs Meals on Wheels Program and VESY (Volunteer Services for the Elderly in Yorkville).

In the silence of these moments at the beginning of our Palm Sunday celebration, let each pray as the heart may prompt!

INTRODUCTION The week of toil has ended. The day of rest is at hand. May the rest and the quiet of this hour of worship refresh our inner life. May it renew in all of us a sense of God's holy and abiding Presence.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION We rest our hearts in the Promise of Jesus who said:

X "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light!"

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction."

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart."

X "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary. And they shall walk and not faint."

"For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. As you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it unto me."

"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you".

X "And all things...whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing...you shall receive. And as many as touched Him were made whole."

PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

O Thou, who hearest prayer, hear our prayers for others, as well as for ourselves.

Touch with healing, O God, those whom ~~we mention in our prayers this hour~~;... ~~for~~ we ~~would~~ call to mind and mention by name:

Helen Breit. Ruth Frame. George Leopold.

( over )

.....cherished members and friends of our parish.

- ✓ Comfort the bereaved and the broken-hearted among us. Abide among us as a healing benediction.

In the name of Jesus Christ, I share with you the Good News:

We are forgiven!

- ✓ Will you all pray with me for: for the hostages held captive in Iran, that they may again be strengthened to live with renewed uncertainty. We pray for their loved ones also.

Grant them courage and hope.  
Make them receptive to the  
touch of the Holy Spirit.

Answer the unspoken prayers offered to thee on the altars of our hearts, spoken in the name and spirit of Jesus who taught us to say when we pray:

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen."



GREETING TO THE CHILDREN: Palm Sunday  
March 30, 1980

INTRODUCTION We're pleased to have the boys and girls of our Sunday School with us for a few moments this morning before they head to their class session upstairs.

To my way of thinking, Palm Sunday and children go together!

CHILDREN Boys and girls, it was on a Sunday such as this long ago, in the spring of the year, that our good friend, Jesus, rode into the great city of Jerusalem.

He didn't arrive in a sleek, black limousine and get whisked to the Jerusalem Hilton and have door man rush out to greet Him. Remember how he came. He came in riding on a donkey and made His way to the Temple area.

The children of the city were there to greet Him. It's reported they spread garments on the ground, waved their jackets in the air, took some palm branches off the trees and waved them and shouted "Hosanna" as He went by. It was a joyous parade.

They loved Jesus and deep in their hearts, they knew that He loved them, too. He was a kind, gentle and good man...a man who went about doing good, helping others. And this is what He would have us do - help others, do good.

LOVE LOAVES Back in February, we put into your hands a little bank called a "love loaf" - in the shape of bread. We asked you to take it home and for the days of Lent to put some dimes and quarters in it for Him, and then to bring it back with you on Palm Sunday or during Holy Week.

The gifts we receive in the love loaves are going to help some people to a new way of life. Jesus was always helping people to a new and a better way of life.

I see you've remembered to bring the love loaves and I wonder if one or two of you could bring them up to the altar and we shall put them on the altar as our gift. Perhaps Mrs. Nespole, Chairperson of the Education Committee, could help me. Thank you boys and girls for remembering to bring the love loaves and I hope the adults in the congregation will do the same.

PALMS Now we'd like to put a palm branch or palm leaf into your hands. This will help you to remember that today is PALM SUNDAY .... thank you for coming.....as you depart, shall we stand and sing the 1st and 2nd verses of Hymn 423. "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna".

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Palm Sunday, March 30, 1980

GREETING We greet the visitors in the congregation this morning. We are delighted to have you with us on this Palm Sunday, and do hope that the opportunity will be ours to greet you in a more personal way following the service - either at the door of our Church, or downstairs in the Russell Room where tea and coffee will be available.

Be free in the sharing of your name. Sign one of our Guest Books. Join us on other Sunday in worship and fellowship. You worship in a Church that has been ministering in the name of Christ to the needs of people in this city since 1837. It is in His name - in the name of Christ - that we this morning bid you a warm welcome!

HOLY WEEK We enter now into Holy Week - indeed, the most important week of the year for the Christian. Please note the Holy Week appointments and the various notices regarding arrangements for the altar lilies, and the celebration of the Last Supper of our Lord on Thursday evening at 6:30 pm.

This Maundy Thursday evening service is always a very moving service for us all. Plan to stop by on your way home from work to share in it.

Next Sunday we shall celebrate the JOY, the VICTORY, and the EXCITEMENT Of the Easter Resurrection Faith. One service at eleven o'clock.

PICK UP COPY Be sure to pick up your copy of the April issue of "A Word in Edgeways" in order to be up to date on all that is planned for the coming weeks of April. Copies are in the usual places, by the door in the narthex and on the table in the Russell Room.

REGISHIGH SCHOOL Again today we are delighted to have with us a number of students from Regis High School, around the corner on East 84th Street, where they are taking a course in Christian Theology under the guidance of Father Stephen Duffy, a friend and colleague.

We welcome these young men and rejoice in this type of ecumenical outreach and encounter. Such contacts and experiences help to heal the wounds in the body of Christ, those divisions that have in other centuries kept us apart. In the name of Christ, welcome!

OFFERING Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." In this spirit, let us worship God with our Palm Sunday offering.

SEARCH AND CARE In the event of a transit strike, many of our elderly neighbors will need help which is ordinarily provided by people who come into Manhattan from Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens.

I am asking that if you are available to provide any time to assist with shopping or cooking or the delivery of meals to our elderly, please mention this to me at the end of today's service.

It's very important. Already we are getting calls from some of our neighborhood friends who are ~~concerned and~~ in need of help.

ONE GREAT HOUR The response to the special appeal of last Sunday - One Great Hour of Sharing - was good. We received \$240 of the \$300. A few more gifts will help us reach that \$300 goal. If you did not respond last week, perhaps you may be tempted to give today. The envelopes are still in the pews.

PASTORAL PRAYER: March 30, 1980

HELP US, O GOD, to worship You...."in spirit and in truth"

Remind us once again in these quiet moments, "that more things are wrought by prayer than this world has ever dreamed."

Here, we would remember Jesus of Nazareth - as He was then, powerful to heal and to help, powerful to speak and to save. We would think of Him as He is now - powerful as Your Spirit at work among us - to lift us up out of the low place, and to set our feet once again on the high road of life.

TOUCH OUR LIVES, we pray this hour: with healing strength,  
cleansing pardon,  
steadiness of vision,  
newness of life.

ON THIS PALM SUNDAY, we would call to mind a day long ago in the Spring of the year when our Lord, Jesus Christ, ~~road~~ rode into the Holy City of Jerusalem. We remember how the people went out to greet Him, how many opened their hearts to receive and accept Him as their Saviour.

We would confess our faithlessness to Him - we who like ancient Jerusalem have so often greeted Him with professions of faith and bursts of enthusiasm, who have followed Him when He was asking little...and ere the week has ended have betrayed Him with neglect, indifference, with coldness of heart.

GRANT, O GOD, that this DAY may bring to us a new vision of His way and word, that this HOLY WEEK BEFORE US may bring to us a deeper understanding of the Cross - and that we may depart from these momentous events - more ready to serve than to be served, to give and not to count the cost, to take up a cross and follow Him.

COME CLOSE, THOU GOD OF COMFORT - to those present this day with some special burden on their hearts. Heal us at the point of our deepest need.

Where there is fear, bring faith.

Where there is a gnawing sense of guilt, bring forgiveness.

Where there is crippling doubt, bring certainty.

AND NOW, ACCEPT our praises and the hosannas we sing.

All this in the spirit of Christ, Lord, Master and Saviour  
for us all.

"If any man would come after me, let  
him deny himself and take up his cross  
and follow me."

## "AMATEURS, EXPERTS AND PALM SUNDAY"

TEXT: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner".

(Luke 20: 17)

INTRODUCTION "Take the bus and leave the driving to us". That commercial of recent years (and we've all seen it) might well serve as the motto of our "expert-oriented" society. Trust us and we'll take the worry out of driving for you. Step on board, pay your fare, sit back, relax; we'll get you there. Don't worry about your investments; let the experts at E. F. Hutton handle them for you. Don't worry about urban congestion; let the city planning experts handle it. Trust us. We know how to do it. We live in an "expert-oriented" society.

It's not my desire to belittle the experts. However, we need to remember that the experts can be wrong. Remember the pollsters of 1948 who had Dewey overwhelming Truman. Remember the Edsel. Remember those who told us to watch for the "no-show" comet, Khahoutec. I'm sure that more than one Broadway show has survived the experts, the critics who called it a failure. And wasn't it Beethoven who was dubbed a failure by most of the critics of his time. The experts can be wrong.

AMATEURS, EXPERTS AND PALM SUNDAY A close and careful reading of the events <sup>TEMP.</sup> of Holy Week reveal a throbbing tension between the religious experts in Jerusalem and the amateurs who crowded the streets and cheered wildly as Jesus rode by on a donkey on that Palm Sunday long ago. The experts and the amateurs confronted each other that day long ago. Throughout most of the life of Jesus this tension seemed to exist that at one point He was moved to pray: (As a matter of fact)

"I thank Thee, Father, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for such was Thy gracious will".

Generally speaking, it was the common people who heard Jesus gladly. We read in Luke 19, the 47th and 48th verses:

"The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people (the experts) sought to destroy Him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people hung on His words".

Or again, in the fellowship chapter, it is recorded that,

"The scribes and the chief priests (the experts) tried to lay hands on Him at that very hour, but they feared the people".

It is true that several days later the crowd that so gladly hailed Jesus on Palm Sunday was to shout "crucify Him" - but this only because the people had been massaged and manipulated by the authorities and infiltrated by paid demonstrators. The fact of the matter is that the religious amateurs of the day warmed to Jesus!

I do not wish to idealize the Populist mind. They were not angels. They

were not saints. They were not seers, but they did detect a quality of love in the actions of Jesus and a quality of truth in His words that they had not known before in the words and actions of the religious experts.

#### WHAT THEN OF THE EXPERTS

What then of the experts? Ironically, they ended up missing the glory that was passing by. And to describe and to heighten this drastic failure, Jesus alluded to a legend in Jewish history - a legend referred to in the 188th Psalm and in one or two other places in the New Testament. This legend had to do with the rearing of Solomon's Temple. All of the hammering and chiseling for that magnificent building was done away from the temple site. As I Kings reports,

"The house when it was in building was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building". (Concern for noise pollution is commendable)

It must have been one of the quietest construction jobs in history!

But as the story has it, there was one stone that kept getting in the way of the builders. They would stumble over it again and again. They knew where all the other stones were to go, but this particular stone was something of a mis-fit, a nuisance. And so, they carted it off away from the construction site. Eventually, however, when they needed the keystone for the great arch, it was to that discarded stone that they had to turn. Hence the words of Jesus which provided this Palm Sunday message with a text:

"The very stone" said Jesus, "which the builders (the experts) rejected has become the head of the corner."

According to the dictionary, a keystone is that wedge-shaped piece at the summit of the arch that is regarded as holding all other pieces together. This was the piece that the builders blew; the piece they carelessly discarded. So much for the inefficiency of the experts. They really blew it.

#### ENTHUSIASTS VERSUS ESTABLISHMENT

This throbbing tension between the experts and the amateurs that underlies the events of Holy Week can also be felt at times in our time. One might say that it surfaces as the polarity that exists between the enthusiasts and the establishment.

It would be easy on Palm Sunday to villify the experts and make the amateurs the heroes of the day. However, the Hebrew tradition, represented by the scribes, the priests, the Pharisees, had made a substantial contribution to the world. These men whom we sometimes see as the villains and the ogres were deeply committed to bequeathing to the world the highest form of religion that men had known up to that time. A belief that God is one, that God is spirit, that God works in history, that man's nature is inherently good, that faith has its moral and ethical demands, that there is meaning in suffering. (PART...FANTASTIC)

The shouts of hosanna made for an exciting expression of religious enthusiasm, but enthusiasm is not enough. Faith must also educate. It has its intellectual and conceptual side as well. "What shall we tell the children?" ask the fathers and mothers. When that question is raised, we need something more than enthusiasm. We need to know how to order our thoughts about the Faith, making them coherent with other areas of man's knowledge.

and occasional bursts of enthusiasm

And faith must also worship. Mystery has been described by someone as the "dancing partner of truth". We cannot live on ecstasy alone for long. There must be a continuing relationship to the "mystery" of faith, and this is essentially what worship is all about - keeping ourselves, our spirits, in touch with mystery.

It has been seriously alleged by a mystical writer of our day that in a very real sense the Church is here to mediate the mystery rather than to lay the mystery bare.

In a book entitled, Contemplating Now, by Monica Furlong, an interesting point is made. The author sees worship as a "buffer" for the divine splendor that might otherwise overpower us. She writes:

"Although on the face of it, the Church seems to exist to help its adherents into a relationship with God, it equally and perhaps essentially, plays the opposite role of trying to filter out an experience of transcendence which might be overwhelming. A highly developed liturgy, such as the Roman mass, can be seen as the tracing out in drama of a reality which the participants could not bear to experience too often, yet which they wish to be kept in touch with. The church's role ( she concludes) is to maintain a balance - a balance between the mystical experience and ordinary life - thus making a contribution to sanity".

Enthusiasm alone is not enough! The experts are not to be thrown out.

ON THE OTHER HAND

But what our text clearly shows is that the religious establishment at times can end up being counter-productive. It can and it has stifled the very faith it was meant to foster. It can and it has become closed to the very God it intends to serve. It can see itself as "end" rather than "means". It happened in the time of Jesus, and it can happen again.

A psychologist by the name of David Bakan defined idolatry as "a loss of the sense of search, of the sense of freshness of experience". In this light, the Church has often been guilty of idolatry - void of a sense of search, a sense of the freshness of experience. It can become heavy, dull, arid, detached from life, with very little real faith being generated from its own life.

Morton Kelsey, an Episcopal scholar, has written a book called, Encounter With God, in which he argues that in our western world we have been trained to perceive knowledge through our minds and our senses, but not through our spirits. In short, we have been cut off from the Eastern tradition of the Church in which spirit is able to intuit and perceive truth. The outer side of experience it can handle easily, but we fail in our neglect of the inner side of experience.

Father Kelsey claims that when we eliminate this dimension of knowing from Christian experience, we cut ourselves off from the New Testament. Here he is speaking of such things as healing and miracles, of dreams and visions, inward hearing, intuitive discernment, direct knowledge (which is akin to extra-sensory perception) and speaking and interpreting in tongues. He makes the astounding point that in 3,874 verses out of 7,957 in the NT, such experiences are described.



Is it any wonder then that there is a "counter-culture" that exists in enmity against the church for its sterile rationalism. Psychiatrists are quick to describe what happens to us inside in the unconscious when we neglect spirit as a form of perception. Overtly what happens when people are denied the immediacy of "spirit with spirit" is that they turn to ouiji boards and voodoo, horoscopes, LSD, palm reading, fortune telling and the like.

BACK TO PALM SUNDAY      Back to the Palm Sunday scene. Palm Sunday - the day the enthusiasm of the multitudes bumped up against the cautious, conservative religious experts. The crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem that day was joyous, enthusiastic and right! They had glimpsed what the experts had failed to see. "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner". Therefore....therefore, let those...

Let those hosannas ring! Often we find order and ardor struggling for domination in the Church. Often the Church has erred on the side of order, neglecting ardor. Let us remember on this day that ardor becomes the people of God, and belongs to the followers of Jesus, as much as order. We sit here this morning in our lovely sanctuary, in our opulent respectability and urbane sophistication, looking in judgment on that scene of long ago, wondering how we might have reacted had we been there - we, who perhaps have never once shouted a single "hurrah" for Jesus, or even uttered quietly a soft "amen" under our breath.

Halford Luccock who use to teach at Yale Divinity School with whim and point put it this way:

"I was impressed several years ago that Eugene Ormandy dislocated a shoulder while leading the Philadelphia Orchestra. I do not know what they were playing....certainly not Mozart, perhaps Stravinsky. But at any rate, he was giving all of himself to it. And I asked myself sadly, 'Did I ever dislocate anything....even a neck-tie for Jesus?'"

CONCLUSION      I don't know about you, but I like Palm Sunday...always have...it's one of my favorite Sundays. I like it because it shows Jesus in action, in His mobility, His insurgency, calling the city and the people to a rare moment of decision. He's on the move. This is how Jesus always is known to us - as One who comes. Yes, those experts and amateurs were faced with a decision...their moment to decide had come. Accept Him or reject Him.

Let those hosannas ring. And ride on, ride on King Jesus - into our world, into our nation, into our city - yes, into our hearts this day.

PRAYER      Lord, we covet the freedom to respond to thee with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Forgive us our caution, our acute self-consciousness, our fear of spontaneity, the hosannas that languish on our tongues. And make us the glad and radiant followers of the King that we were meant to be, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen