

"CUT DOWN - LIFTED UP"

A Sermon By

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Park Avenue United Methodist Church  
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New York, New York 10028  
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### INTRODUCTION

Let me begin this Palm Sunday message by sharing with you a little parable. Once upon a time in the heart of a certain Eastern Kingdom there was a beautiful garden. And of all of the dwellers of this garden - the flowers, the plants, the trees - none was more beautiful and beloved to the master of the garden than a splendid and noble Bamboo. Year after year, this Bamboo tree grew yet more beautiful and gracious. The Bamboo was conscious of his master's love, yet he was modest and in all things quite gentle.

Often when the winds came to revel in the garden, Bamboo would throw aside his dignity. He would dance and sway merrily, tossing and leaping and bowing in joyous abandon. He would lead the great dance of the garden which never failed to move his master's heart.

### DEVELOPMENT

One day the master himself drew near to look at this Bamboo tree with eyes of curious expectancy. And Bamboo, in a passion of love, bowed his head to the ground in joyful greeting. The master quietly spoke, "Bamboo, I would use you". Bamboo flung his head to the sky in utter delight. The day of days had been growing hour by hour, that day in which he would find his completion and destiny. His voice came low, "Master... I am ready. Use me as you will."

The master's voice was grave, "Bamboo, I would be obliged to take you and cut you down". A trembling of horror shook Bamboo. "Cut me down? Me, whom you, o master, have made the most beautiful in all your garden? Cut me down? Not that, not that. Use me for your joy, o master, but cut me not down".

"Beloved, Bamboo" replied the master in a grave voice. "If I do not cut you down, I cannot use you." As he spoke the garden grew still. The wind held her breath. Bamboo slowly bent his proud and glorious head. Then came a whisper, "Master, if you cannot use me unless you cut me down, then do your will and cut."

"Bamboo, beloved Bamboo...I would cut your leaves and branches also". "Master, o master...spare me. Cut me down and lay my beauty in the dust, but would you take from me my leaves and branches also?" "Bambao, alas! If I do not cut them away, I cannot use you". The sun hid her face. A listening butterfly glided fearfully away. Bamboo shivered in terrible expectancy, whispering low, "Master, o master...cut away".

"Bamboo, bamboo....I would divide you in two and cut out your heart, for if I do not so cut, I cannot use you". "Master, master...then cut and divide."

### A CHANNEL

So the master of this beautiful garden took his beloved Bamboo tree and cut him down and then hacked off his branches and stripped his leaves and divided him in two and cut out his heart, and lifting him gently, carried him to where there was a spring of fresh, sparkling water in the midst of the master's dry fields. Then putting down one end of broken Bamboo into the spring and the other end into the water channel in his field, the master laid down with great gentleness his beloved Bamboo.

The spring sang welcome. The clear sparkling water raced joyously down the channel of Bamboo's torn body into the waiting dry fields. Then the rice was planted and the days went by. Soon the shoots grew and one day there came a great harvest. In that day was Bamboo, once so glorious in his stately beauty...yet now more glorious in his brokenness and humility.

For in his beauty he was life abundant. But in his brokenness he became a channel of abundant life to his master's world. A little parable for this Palm Sunday - not about palm branches, but about Bamboo and even more about Christ. - a channel of abundant life to God's waiting world.

Hear again those magnificent words of St. Paul in his letter to the Philipians:

"Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus:  
Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery  
to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation,  
and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made  
in the likeness of men,

And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself,  
and became obedient unto death, even the death of the  
Cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and  
given Him a name which is above every name,

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of  
things in heaven, and things in earth and things under  
the earth; and that every tongue should confess that  
Jesus is Lord - the glory of God, the Father."

In these poetic lines we discover three things about Christ: who He is, what He has done in our behalf, and finally what our attitude toward Him ought always to be. Think on these three things in these coming days of Holy Week.

#### WHO HE IS

Let's consider, first of all, who He is. And here I think that many of us would like to straddle the fence at this point. Intellectually, we count ourselves among the Trinitarians. Oh, some of you may be "closet" Trinitarians, like a Unitarian colleague and friend of mine. We gladly embrace the language - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but deep in our hearts we are reluctant to make that "all-out" commitment to the divinity of Christ.

The moral superiority of His teachings we consider beyond question. And the picture He gives us of God is one we would want the whole world to embrace. The love which He taught and personified we acknowledge to surpass our own in almost infinite proportions. And still, we want to "lump Him" with other religious geniuses like Moses, and Confucius, and Buddha and Mohammed. We cannot allow ourselves to fully acknowledge Him as Lord. That is too much to ask of us intellectually. Some present feel that way.

Even more important, it is too much to ask of us spiritually, for if He truly is Lord, it would be impossible for us to keep Him safely at arm's length. Acknowledging Him as Lord may require too much from us - not only of our minds, but also our hearts. Yet, this is the "bold contention" of our faith. Jesus is more than mere humanity. This is the deep mystery of which we catch a fleeting glimpse in the events of Good Friday. He is part of the Triune God.

Dorothy Sayers had one of the simplest and most helpful explanations of the puzzling doctrine of the Trinity I know of. She used the example of a book. She noted that, at first, the book is only an idea in its author's mind. Then it becomes a book - one that you can hold and read and study. As you begin to grasp and comprehend its ideas and to put its precepts into action, however, it becomes something else. It takes on a kind of life of its own in your mind. So, one work, but in three forms: idea, book and the realization in the reader's mind.

Christians believe that God also manifests Himself in three forms - God in His Divine essence. God in the historical person, Jesus...and God, the Holy Spirit, who is the inward witness of Himself. God, "present with us for guidance and strength" as it says in one of our creeds. Thus, we can see how St. Paul could describe Christ as "being in the form of God" and thinking "it not robbery to be equal with God". That is who He is and this we need to focus on this Palm Sunday morning.

WHAT HE HAS DONE

We also need to consider what He has done in our behalf. Again, the words of St. Paul who tells us that He,

"Took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Milton, in his immortal work, Paradise Lost, tells us about an angel who sought to be equal with God. And for this he was cast out of Heaven and now reigns in hell. These are the words that Milton attributed to Satan, the fallen angel, "Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven". Note the difference between Satan and Christ. Paul here described Christ as One who does not strive to be equal with God, but rather humbles Himself to the level of humanity, who becomes a servant, and finally dies like a common thief.

On Palm Sunday we are again made mindful of the humility of Christ, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. History records that when Chancellor Bismarck of Prussia back in the 19th century chose to make his grand entrance into Jerusalem he did so on a white horse. And he was accompanied by such a large army of officials that a section of the wall of Jerusalem had to be removed. That is the way a person of "greatness" is supposed to enter a city. Limos...loudspeakers. lines of press releases. Not the humble Nazarene riding a lowly donkey borrowed by Him for this entrance.

Even more did He humble Himself on a cross. Just as Bambaoo was stripped of his leaves, with his stalk cut in two and his heart cut out, so the beloved Christ was stripped of His dignity, and forsaken by His friends, broken in body if not in spirit. And all of this He did on our behalf.

In a Peanuts cartoon, Charlie Brown and Linus are standing next to each other, staring at a star-filled sky. "Would you like to see a falling star?" Charlie Brown asks Linus.

"Sure..." responds Linus. "Then again, I don't know" he adds, after some thought. "I'd sure hate to have it fall just on my account..."

In his book, Parables of Peanuts, Robert Short used that cartoon to make

(the point that a "star" did fall on our account. God broke into this world of ours and walked in our midst as Jesus. Like a lamb led to slaughter, He died on our account. What humility we see on Palm Sunday. And what love and oh, what He accomplished there for us.

I read somewhere recently that back in 1927 a man named Asibi - a West African native - was stricken with the deadly disease of yellow fever. However, Asibi lived and because his system had conquered the disease, Asibi's blood contained the antibodies from which to begin to develop a successful vaccine.

Today doctors and drug companies have developed an efficient vaccine against yellow fever and their cure has saved the lives of untold numbers of people around the world. Each dose of vaccine, though, can be traced back to one original blood sample - that of Asibi's. Literally, the blood of one man has saved the lives of millions of people.

In a deeply mysterious way that we cannot fully understand this is what took place in that Good Friday scene at Calvary's cross. "By His stripes we have been healed". And no stamps are needed or required for the "redemption" center of the cross. There is room at the foot of the cross for us all. First, who He is. Second, what He did there in our behalf as the human and the divine interacted.

#### OUR RESPONSE

And finally, we need to see the appropriate response on our part to whom Christ is and what He has done. And that response - our response - is to bow at His feet and acknowledge Him as Lord.

Said Paul, "Wherefore God has also exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus - EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW!"

Yes, we need to join the happy crowds who threw down their coats before Him as He rode into Jerusalem that day long ago. There may be that person present here today who needs to join that swelling chorus who sang, "Hosanna to Him who comes in the name of the Lord". But even more than that, all of us need to make Him the Lord of our lives and follow where He leads....with faith, trust, courage, joy and enthusiasm.

A lot of us would like to be like Tommy Lasorda, that irrepressible manager of the LA Dodgers. Not too long ago I got to shake hands with Tommy Lasorda. I was at the formal dinner meeting here in the city of the BWAA...a year ago last January. I found myself sitting next to this beautiful but "dolled up" lady in her late forties. And being somewhat shy, I was slow to initiate conversation with her at the dinner table until I noticed Tommy Lasorda coming to the end of the dais and looking in my direction (we were off to the side), and so I said in a deep and commanding voice, "That's Tommy Lasorda...he's the manager of the World Champion LA Dodgers. Tommy Lasorda". She smiled and putting her hand on my arm said, "Yes, I know....I'm married to Tommy".

Lasorda about that time accepted a fee to wear a certain shoe. And then another manufacturer made a similar offer and then he had a problem. How could he possibly wear both? He thought that maybe he could wear one brand at home and the other on the road and get two fees, but neither company liked that idea. Finally, he figured out a way to get both fees. He simply wore one shoe from each manufacturer....at the same time, that is.

The point is that some of us would like to follow the same tactic in dividing our allegiance as we walk through life, dividing our loyalties between Christ and the world. Are you trying to "go" with one shoe in each hand. Think about it. As St. Paul reminds us, if we have the mind of Christ in us, we cannot at the same time have the mind of the world. It cannot be done. Where do you fit in? Divided loyalties? Yes, you better believe it!

Consider who He is. Consider what He has done in our behalf - your behalf. And finally consider in these days of Holy Week 1990 your own response.

Are you ready to join in the "hosannas" and proclaim Him the Lord of your life?

Are you willing to be "stripped" of your leaves and walk that road leading to Calvary's cross?

Are you ready to proclaim in deep faith "Lord...to the glory of God, the Father?"

The choice is yours to make. Let us bow our heads and unite our hearts together in prayer.

VER Let our prayer in this quiet moment at the end of this Palm Sunday service be a silent searching of our own hearts, as we struggle to wrestle to answer these questions in a way that Jesus would have us answer. Help us to walk the high road with Him at all times. In His name we pray. Amen

PASTORAL PRAYER: April 8, 1990.

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

REMINDE US once again in these quiet moments together 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, 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, rode into the Holy City of  
Jerusalem. We remember how the people went out to greet Him,  
how many opened their hearts to receive Him, to accept Him as  
Lord and 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 His  
Word, that this Holy Week into which we have entered 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.

Where there is fear, bring faith.  
Where there is guilt, bring forgiveness.  
Where there is crippling doubt, bring certainty.

AND NOW, accept the praises and the hosannas we sing. All this in the  
name and spirit of Christ, Lord and Master  
for us all.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, April 8, 1990 / PALM SUNDAY

I. VISITORS / GREETING

- A. We welcome the visitors in the congregation on this Palm Sunday...invite you to make yourselves known to us...fill out a visitor card or sign one of the Guest Books... join us downstairs for coffee...worship with us on other Sundays. Work with us, too, in the various programs of outreach...
- B. The roots of this Church are deep in the soil....doing the Lord's work here at this busy corner...since 1837. We minister in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit that we greet all of you....
- C. Members are reminded to wear their name tags....and to make a point of making two new friends here this day. It could make a difference in your life!

II. HOLY WEEK APPROACHES

- A. Palm Sunday ushers in the "high, holy days" of our Church year. We now enter the most important week of the year for the Christian. Please note the Holy Week announcements and notices....regarding Easter altar lily arrangements, the Maundy Thursday service of Holy Communion and the hour on Good Friday for prayer and meditation
- B. Next Sunday we shall come together at eleven to celebrate the joy, victory and excitement of our Easter Faith. One service...arrive early in order to get your favorite seat.
- C. Palm leaves will be given to you at the door following the service. And those planning to attend Alec McGowen's "St. Mark's Gospel" should be in touch with Ken Borgeson. And our thanks to those who cooked the pancake breakfast this morning...especially to Rick Kilbride...some \_\_\_\_\_ attended.

III. LOOKING AHEAD

- A. Fellowship Supper. April 22nd...two weeks from this evening. Note the flyer describing it and be sure to "sign up".

IV. OFFERING

- A. Jesus said that "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit let us worship God with our morning offering.



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GREETING TO THE CHILDREN: Palm Sunday

INTRODUCTION

Children and Palm Sunday go together! How nice it is to have the boys and girls of our Sunday School down here with us. They're going to sing for us in a moment and then we're going to present them with a palm leaf.

PALM SUNDAY

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.

They didn't bring Him in by limousine or helicopter and whisk Him off to the Jerusalem Hilton. The mayor of the city wasn't there to greet Him or give Him a key to the city.

The children of the city were there to greet Him. There was no red carpet rolled out for Him to walk on...but it is reported that the children spread their garment on the ground, waved their jackets in the air, took off some palm branches and leaves from near-by trees and waved them in the air and shouted "Hosanna" as He went by. He was riding on a donkey.

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 things...always reaching out to help others. And this is what He would have us do - do good and help others.

LOVE LOAVES

Back in late February and early March we put into your hands a little bank called a "love loaf" - in the shape of a small loaf of bread. We asked you to take it home and for the 40 days of Lent to put some dimes and nickels and quarters in to it for HIM, and then to bring it back with you on Palm Sunday or during Holy Week.

Your gifts will help others...people who are hungry. I see you've remembered to bring the loaves and we'll be glad to receive them at this time. Why don't you bring them up to the altar now and then stay on the steps for the song you're going to sing and after your song I shall give each of you a palm leaf.

AFTER THE SONG

Thank you. Now for the palm leaves. Wave them as you go down the aisle and let's all sing one verse of hymn 278, "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna"....

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