

**On Palm Sunday:
Three Good Reasons to Give to God—
& to the Capital Fund Appeal
Sermon on Psalm 24
Saint Mark's, Watertown
Pastor Karl Walther
March 16, 2008**

As Scripture says: *Christ humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.* Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration today is Hymn Twenty-Four in the inspired Old Testament Hymnal, the Psalms.

When David wrote it, entirely possibly he had in mind the time he brought into Jerusalem and the house of the Lord the ark of the covenant—that two and a half foot by two and a half foot by four foot chest, overlaid with gold, overshadowed by angels, and representing the presence of God himself. We'll find that the psalm fits well the two occasions we observe today: Palm Sunday and Commitment Sunday.

Would you read it with me? It's printed in the service folder:

(Of David. A psalm.) The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. (Selah.)

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty-- he is the King of glory. (Selah.)

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

On Palm Sunday ... the Capital Fund Appeal

Dear fellow Christians—gathered together on Palm Sunday weekend and on Commitment Sunday weekend:

At first glance, they don't seem to have a lot in common, do they? – Palm Sunday versus Commitment Sunday, Christ's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem versus our building project over at school, crowds in worship versus our capital funding appeal.

But we'll find today that it's not difficult to relate the two. This psalm does a nice job of it. In fact, we'll find that this psalm actually celebrates well what happened on Palm Sunday, plus it gives us three good reasons to give to God—as well as our capital funding appeal.

Reason One: We Owe Our Lives to the Lord

The first thing we read, of course, is that this is: *(Of David. A psalm.)* So, this is a Spirit-inspired song, written by David: in Israel, a thousand years before the time of Christ. And it got sung by God's people ever afterwards.

The song starts with an appropriate reminder that it is an awesome thing to approach God in worship, because God is the Supreme Owner of everything. *The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.* This planet and all its contents – not to mention the entire universe itself! – is the property of God. *For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.* On Day Three of Creation, God drew dry land out of the murky chaos which was this world. And afterwards, God filled the dry land with plants and living beings.

Now, that's the first thing that inspired the worshippers on the original Palm Sunday. They knew that among all the so-called gods of this world—Ra and Osiris of the Egyptians, Bel and Marduk of the Mesopotamians, Zeus or Aphrodite or Ares of the Greeks, and Jupiter or Venus or Mars of the Romans: among all the so-called gods of this world, their God – the Lord! – whom they were worshipping was the only real God.

And you and I know precisely the same! Allah, for example, is nothing. Allah never did a single thing in the history of this world to demonstrate his presence. And that's because Allah doesn't exist. He was invented out of the mind of a man. It's the same thing with Buddha. It's the same thing with the three hundred thirty million gods of the Hindus—or any other so-called god in this world.

But our God split the sea and drowned the pharaoh and rescued his people. Our God divided the river and stripped Jericho of its walls and gave his land to his people. Our God slew Canaanites and Philistine and Assyrians in order to deliver his people. In fact, our God was born, and lived a real life, and died a real death, and rose (!). (Allah, I defy you to try to do that with your prophet! If you're a god, Allah, raise him out of his Mecca tomb today!) And before all this, our God made all things. And since that time, our God has held together all things—such that, if our God were to withdraw his sustaining hand even for an instant, all the world would disintegrate into oblivion.

Our God the owner of everything! That's why people on Palm Sunday not only took those great big palm fronds off the trees – but also the jackets off their backs! – to cushion his ride into Jerusalem. And you and I do the same! Our God owns us and all we have. We owe him all we have. So, when the offering basket came by earlier, we wanted to jump into it ourselves—and not just put money in it. When the commitment basket comes by later, we will want to jump into it ourselves—and not just put a slip of paper in there. And that's because we owe our God absolutely everything!

That's also why we generously give to the true Lord the first of our money on a regular and repeated basis. And it's why we're willing generously to give him an extra large chunk of our money for the capital funding campaign.

Reason Two: We Owe Our Eternal Lives to the Lord

So, we worship the Lord, because he's the owner of everything. But that's a scary thought when we realize that he's perfectly holy and we are not....

Along those lines, David asks: *Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?* David is looking up at the house of the Lord and asking: Who dares to enter that? And the answer: *He who has clean hands* enters that clean place, *and* he who has *a pure heart* enters that pure place. It has to be someone *who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.* Only somebody with confidence in the true Lord dares to enter the presence of the true Lord. *He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior.* And ah: that's the issue! Sinners need to be right in God's sight – God has got to be their Savior! – for them to enter into his presence. *Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.* And then, there's a *selah*—that is a musical interlude for reflection. So, let's reflect, but without the musical interlude (!).

All of what I just read is what the worshippers on the first Palm Sunday enjoyed. They knew they needed *vindication from God their Savior*. That's why they cried out to Jesus: *Hosanna!*—which means: *Save us, now!* They also cried out: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*—the fulfillment of Psalm one eighteen, identifying Jesus as victor over death. They also cried out: *Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!*—because Jesus would slay their enemy, in this case: Satan, for them.

And you and I enjoy exactly what those Palm Sunday worshippers did! I mean: Do you have *clean enough hands to ascend the hill of the Lord?* Yes! because Jesus' hands were pierced in penalty for the transgressions that your hands committed. Do you have a *pure enough heart to stand in God's holy place?* Yes! because Jesus has attributed the pure desires of his heart over to you. Do you have *vindication from God your Savior?* Yes! because in God's court of law, Jesus has won for you an innocent verdict, and he has undergone the death penalty to pay the price for your iniquities.

Jesus is Savior of all! That's why you'd just as soon spend all your time with Jesus!—and someday you will. It's why you want to use your every skill for Jesus. And it's why you'd just as soon spend all your resources on Christ. The day will come – and really that day is now! – when Christ is all you'll want and all you'll need.

All of which makes it easy for us to spend our money on Jesus—first of all, in regular offerings, as we have; and secondly, in the capital funding appeal, as we will.

Reason Three: We Owe It to Others to Share the Lord's Life

So, we worship the Lord and render to him our offerings because he is owner of all things and has also bought our souls. God has done the same for others....

David concludes with a powerful refrain to his song—and one that he essentially repeats. David is looking at the city gates to Jerusalem – thirteen to fourteen feet wide, and taller yet than that – through which the ark of the covenant will now process and come to rest. And David says: *Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. – Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.* And again: *Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. – Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty-- he is the King of glory*—with another *musical interlude*.

And of course, all of this is exactly what happened on Palm Sunday. When the ark of the covenant entered Jerusalem, it was the representation of God's presence. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, God himself was present: the King of glory, the Lord almighty.

And that same God is present right here, right now. God, the owner of all things, has been speaking to us during this entire service by way of his Word. God, the Savior of all people, is present here where two or three or more are gathered together. Christ our Savior will be present here in the flesh in the Holy Sacrament. And God, the Supreme Proprietor of the Universe, dwells in your heart by God-given faith.

And how did he get there? – by the proclamation of the gospel! And how will you share him? – by the proclamation of the gospel! And what does that mean to your life? – Yes, it means that you speak to your family and friends about salvation through Jesus Christ. But frankly, it also means you give money to church—to pay missionaries, professors, pastors, and teachers to deliver Jesus to others also. And right now, it all means that we build on to the school, so that these people have a place to do their work.

And that will require more money – a second mortgage, so to speak – from each of us. But you'll be happy to give it. I'll be happy to give it. After all, when all is said

and done, the instruction that takes place in that building – as well as here – will deliver souls to dwell in heavenly glory with us.

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So, there you have it. On Palm Sunday: Three Good Reasons to Give to God— and to the Capital Funding Campaign. One: we owe our lives to the Lord. Two: we owe our eternal lives to the Lord. Three: we owe it to others to share the Lord's life with them.

Are you willing to join me in committing to that? – Ah, how can we not do so?— when we consider Christ's commitment to us: marching into Jerusalem to suffer damnation for us, and marching into our hearts to work salvation for us.... Amen.

As Scripture says: *God exalted Jesus to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name.. Amen.*