

Palm Sunday

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. In the ancient world, the palm, or the palm tree, was a symbol of military victory, a symbol of athletic achievement, and even, even a symbol of Jewish nationalism.

For in the ancient world, the palm was a symbol of military victory, something the Romans would give their generals after a successful military campaign. And in the ancient world, the palm was also a symbol of athletic achievement, something the ancient Greeks would give their champions after winning this or that physical contest.

And to the Jews living under Roman rule in our Lord's Day, the palm was also a symbol of Jewish nationalism. Harkening back to the days when Judah was a free nation with its own currency, coins that did not have the face of Caesar upon them, but instead bore the image of a palm.

For around 200 years before, Jesus Christ rode triumphantly into the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. There was another man who was welcomed into the city of Jerusalem with the waving of palms, and that man was a Jewish priest by the name of Judas Maccabeus.

And the reason the people waved palms for Judas Maccabeus was because he was leading what was turning out to be, and what in time would eventually become, a successful revolt against the armies of the Greeks, who back then had control over both Jerusalem as well as all of Judah.

[1 : 49] Therefore, the reason the people of Jerusalem waved palms for Maccabeus was because he was their champion. Victorious in battle and strong in war, Judas Maccabeus was a Jewish national hero, and still is today.

After all, Maccabeus is one of the reasons Jews today celebrate Hanukkah. And shortly after, Maccabeus drove the Greeks right out of the city and cleansed the temple in Jerusalem of all the statues of the Greek gods.

The people of ancient Judah commemorated Maccabeus' victory by placing the image of a palm on several of their newly minted coins, which is how the palm became a symbol of Jewish national pride.

For thanks be to Judas Maccabeus, Jerusalem was finally free. Free, that is, until 63 B.C., when the Roman general Pompey conquered the city once more.

And so, around a hundred years later, Jerusalem was still under the cruel tyranny of Rome, a pagan empire that worshipped the same gods as the Greeks, but only by different names.

[3 : 10] But then came a man riding in on a donkey, who said that a great kingdom was coming, who even possessed all the power and the might of God. And could this be him?

The people must have wondered. Could this be our Savior? Could this Jesus be a man just like Judas Maccabeus, who has come to set us free from all the cruelty, not of the Greeks, but this time, come to set us free from all the cruelty of Rome?

And if so, then let us wave our palms in triumph, just as we did for Maccabeus, and let us shout, Hosanna, which means, save us now.

But of course, much to the disappointment of so many in Jerusalem, Jesus Christ was nothing like Judas Maccabeus, which is probably why on Good Friday, the people shouted out in frustration, anger, and perhaps even despair, away with him, away with him, crucify, crucify this false prophet, this false god, this so-called king of the Jews, to which our Lord responded by saying, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

For on Palm Sunday, the people had hoped for one kind of Savior, only to receive a very different kind of Savior, five days later on Good Friday.

[4 : 50] But is this the kind of Savior you want? The Savior who achieves victory by being cloaked in defeat? To be fair, it doesn't really matter if this is the kind of Savior any man wants or not,

because ultimately, this is the kind of Savior all men need.

For throughout history, there have been several brave men who have accomplished many heroic deeds, but there really is only one Jesus, only one Christ, only one perfect mediator between God and man.

For what Christ Jesus has done, no other man in history could ever do. Therefore, Hosanna, O Lord, that is, save us now.

Save us, for the faithful dead need resurrection. Therefore, Hosanna, O Lord, that is, save us now. Save us, for the world sits in turmoil, since it has forgotten you, its true king.

Therefore, Hosanna, O Lord, that is, save us now. Save us, for we all are in need of your mercy, your strength, and your peace.

[6 : 08] For in ancient times, the palm or the palm tree might have been a symbol of military victory, athletic achievement, and even Jewish nationalism. But today, there stands a symbol of an even greater victory, of an even greater champion, and the hope and joy of not just one nation, but of every nation of every man.

And that symbol is, of course, the cross of Christ. And if we are strong enough, and even brave enough to face it, then in only five short days, will we all see what it truly took to set all men free, free of an even greater tyranny of sin, death, and the devil.

And so, in preparation for that day, in preparation for that good Friday, do we now say, Hosanna to the Son of David, that is, Lord, save us, and save us soon.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.