

## I.N.I.

Palm Sunday  
March 25, 2018  
Matthew 21:12-17

In Christ Jesus, who received the praise of little children, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I am sure you have heard the old saying "children should be seen and not heard." My siblings and I felt that way when we visited one of our Grandfathers who was quite gruff and only patted us on our heads when we met him. He would rather watch us play quietly than to hear us chatter. But Scripture says **OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES AND NURSING INFANTS YOU HAVE ORDAINED STRENGTH, BECAUSE OF YOUR ENEMIES, THAT YOU MAY SILENCE THE ENEMY AND THE AVENGER.** The Lord God does not need the praise of the intellectual, famous, rich and proud, He is content and pleased with the praise of babies and nursing infants. And we see that in this morning's sermon text.

We have been considering the ironies of the Passion. Irony is an outcome that's the opposite of what you might expect. You wouldn't expect a little child to teach an adult and yet we see that everyday when we see our little children fold their hands and pray "Abba, Father" or say their simple bed time prayers and ask Jesus to heal their "owies" and forgive their naughty sins. Little children teach us adults a lot about simple faith.

We just sang, "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna." This morning, we want to consider the incident that inspired that stirring hymn. We want to see the irony in the question Jesus' enemies asked:

### **DO YOU HEAR WHAT THESE CHILDREN ARE SAYING?**

Matthew writes, **BUT WHEN THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES SAW THE WONDERFUL THINGS THAT HE DID,** . . . What does *wonderful* mean? "Really good!" right? That's true. However, the Greek word Matthew uses here means more than that. It means "something that causes people to wonder—to be amazed, stand in awe." Jesus did things on this day that caused people's mouths to drop open in surprise, things that caused people to praise God for His unexpected blessings.

What things were so wonderful? The great triumphal entry into Jerusalem certainly caused people to notice and wonder. But that event happened the day before. That's not obvious from Matthew's account, but Mark makes it very clear. It is now Monday of Holy Week and Jesus went to the temple. What did He find there? Money changers and merchants. You see, this was the week of Passover. God's law required every Jewish male to come to Jerusalem to celebrate this festival. Jews came from all over the Roman world. God allowed people who came from far away to purchase their lambs for the Passover meal at the temple. However, the merchants had moved into the temple to do this buying and selling and they manipulated the exchange rates to make more money. The merchants overcharged for the lambs and doves. One commentator said "It was kind of like buying a hot dog at a football game. It costs a whole lot more there than it does at the grocery store."

The money changers and merchants were cheating the people. So Jesus drove out the money changers and those selling

livestock, and He called them thieves. This was actually the second time He did this. The first time was at the beginning of His ministry. Now Jesus repeated this action at the end. That was the first wonderful thing—the first amazing thing—He did that day.

The second was even more amazing. Matthew writes, **THEN THE BLIND AND THE LAME CAME TO HIM IN THE TEMPLE, AND HE HEALED THEM.** Now, Jesus had been healing people for three years. But now before His ministry ended He did it again. And there was even a third wonderful thing, a third miracle Jesus did that day. He called forth a response of faith. Children were singing in the temple courts, **"HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID!"** Obviously, they had been there the day before with the crowds that waved their palm branches and spread their cloaks and welcomed Jesus with those same words. They were still singing the praises that had excited them so much the day before. Much like our little children singing songs they learned in Sunday School or VBS days later. All three of these wonderful things meant the same thing: Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. All the amazing things Jesus did that day were saying, "See! The one you've been waiting for is here!"

The children understood that! *Hosanna* means "save, we pray!" It was the traditional welcome cry for the promised Savior. *The Son of David* was the title of the King who was coming to set God's people free. That's what these children shouted to Jesus, but they didn't say those things on their own. The Holy Spirit was working in their hearts to bring forth the fruits of faith. That's not ironic. We expect God to work through His Word to change hearts and open mouths. The irony lay on the other side. Matthew writes, **BUT WHEN THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES SAW THE WONDERFUL THINGS THAT HE DID, AND THE CHILDREN CRYING OUT IN THE TEMPLE AND SAYING, "HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID!" THEY WERE INDIGNANT.**

The priests and the teachers of the law were the religious experts. They spent their days reading the Bible. However, when these wonderful things happened just like God promised they would in the Old Testament—when the Savior came—they didn't recognize Him. They were angry that other people, even little children, were claiming He was the Messiah.

Wow! Little children knew their Savior while the adult theologians didn't. But as we said, it's no different today. The intellectuals of our day smirk at "foolish" people like us who need to believe in a crutch like Jesus or a "pie in the sky" belief like heaven. People who don't believe in Jesus think we're just stupid. One of the saddest realities of the Christian church in the 21st century is that there are some pastors and professors of theology who do not even believe in Jesus anymore—at least not the way these children did, as the only Savior of the world. They don't accept a Savior who died and rose to give us eternal life. They don't claim that God came in the flesh to pay for our sins. They deny that God prophesied in the Old Testament that this Savior would appear. That's sad, because God promised it all in His Word, but all over the world, people refuse to see it. Why?

They don't see it because they don't want to believe it.

People today will believe almost anything. In a past life, you were Napoleon or Cleopatra or some other famous person. We can contact the supernatural with our meditating and mantras. We can become gods. But God coming down to earth, becoming a human being and paying for our sins with His own blood so that we won't go to hell—well, not that! Why not? Because that would mean God is a judge. That would mean there is an absolute standard of truth, of right and wrong that every person on earth must submit to or suffer the consequences. Absolute truth—people today just won't accept that because it would mean that some people are, in fact, wrong. It would mean that people are guilty of sin and that they deserve to suffer in hell forever.

Yet simple Christians the world over see Jesus with the faith of a child. They recognize the Savior who came to give us peace. They know the only answer for the guilt we feel over our sins and for the hurt and sadness that our sin causes in our lives is Jesus. Yes, that does mean that there is absolute truth. Sin is rebellion against God. The simple, humble Christian admits, "I have rebelled against God over and over again in my life and Jesus is the only solution."

Jesus rode into Jerusalem to be our Savior and was welcomed with praises. Palm Sunday was the beginning of the end of Jesus' life. Five days later some of those same people, perhaps, were chanting, "**Crucify him! Crucify him!**" How's that for irony?

But Jesus wanted the Romans to nail Him to the cross. He wanted to hang there and be abandoned by His Father. Jesus wanted to die. Why? Because we have broken God's absolute laws and that was the only way to wash away our sin. Unless Jesus hung on that cross and felt His Father's wrath, unless Jesus suffered an eternity of hell and punishment on the cross on Good Friday, all people on earth would be doomed to hell. So Jesus rode into Jerusalem, and on the next day, healed the sick, cleansed His Father's house, and inspired the children to sing their song of praise so that generations of Christians would see their Savior and trust that He has taken their place. He has paid for our sins. We are forgiven. God has given us eternal life.

**DO YOU HEAR WHAT THESE CHILDREN ARE SAYING?**

**I: UNDERSTAND THESE WONDERFUL THINGS!**

"**Do you hear what they're saying?**" That question often means someone is in trouble. Maybe they told a lie or swore or cursed or gossiped. That question is almost always a rebuke.

That's how it was meant by the Jewish leaders to Jesus. "**DO YOU HEAR WHAT THESE CHILDREN ARE SAYING?**" These men were horrified that Jewish children would call Jesus the Messiah. They actually seem to have thought that Jesus would be embarrassed enough to tell the children to be quiet. But once again, they failed to understand God's plan. Jesus replied, **YES. HAVE YOU NEVER READ, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES AND NURSING INFANTS YOU HAVE PERFECTED PRAISE'?** Jesus not only heard what they were saying, He approved of it. This was exactly what God wanted to happen.

Jesus quoted Psalm 8:2. In that psalm, God taught His people that He treasured the praise of children because it comes from hearts of faith. Most Jewish people in Jesus' day

recognized that Psalm 8 is a prophecy about the coming Savior. So when Jesus quoted it, He left His enemies defenseless. Then He left them. But He had given them something important to think about. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had taught them that only those who have the faith of a child would see the kingdom of heaven. Now He reminded them that it is the faith of a child that brings forth the praise God is looking for.

God ordains praise from children's lips. What does that mean? It is God who causes children to sing and say their praises to Jesus. Through their baptisms and through the gospel message they hear in church, in Sunday School, and at home, God reaches into their hearts and fills them with joy in their Savior and confidence in His promises. Children take God at His word.

Where can we adults get faith like little children? Only in the same place—the Gospel. The Gospel comes to us in the Word and in the Sacraments. The message that our Savior died and rose for us and that we are forgiven is the Gospel. Every promise that Jesus gives us, that He helps us, and that He loves and cares for us is the Gospel. From that Gospel comes first a change in our hearts. God gives us faith. Then every time we hear that Gospel message, God renews and strengthens that faith. And through that Gospel comes a change in our lives. God calls forth our praise.

We praise God in all the ways we trust Him. We praise God in all the times we turn to Him in repentance or in need and ask Him to help us. We praise God when we lift up our voices and sing to our Savior who has loved us and changed us and made us His own. We praise God in every way we serve Him with our lives in obedience to His Word.

Praise Him because you are His. The beauty of this lesson is that God reminds us that He Himself is the source of our praise. He ordains praise from our children and from us adults.

**DO YOU HEAR WHAT THESE CHILDREN ARE SAYING?**

**II: JOIN THEM IN THEIR SONG OF PRAISE!**

Amen.