

“No Crown Without a Cross for Jesus”

Date: April 17, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 26:14 - 27:66

Theme: Sacrifice

Occasion: Palm Sunday

Today is called Palm-Passion Sunday. Those who create liturgical calendars have given this day its new name, because so many people no longer come to the services between Palm Sunday and Easter. In fact, in one church I used to pastor, the lay leader told me, “I don’t do those services, because they’re so sad.”

Isn’t that the way it is with many of us? We want the glory of Palm Sunday, and of course we love the glory of Easter. “But,” we think to ourselves, “can’t we skip the part in the middle, how Jesus was arrested, mocked, tortured and killed? It’s so messy.” But we have to tell the *whole* story.

Because the story of Jesus triumphantly entering Jerusalem is intimately connected with Good Friday. For Jesus, there would be no crown without a cross. Without the sacrifice, Jesus would have been just another rabbi, perhaps a notable prophet. But He would not have been the Savior of the world

You see, Jesus was more than a martyr. God used the death of Jesus as the means of forgiving the human race of our sin. It was God’s plan of atonement, to allow us to be at one with God again, to have fellowship with our Creator once more. The sin that divides us was overcome. The suffering Jesus endured was redemptive suffering.

It had a purpose. By His death, sin and death were conquered. From death comes the gift of life. Jesus had to endure the penalty of crucifixion, as the only sinless man to live, in order to take away the sins of the world. His death was a vicarious suffering on our behalf. He bore the cross for you and me.

Next week, when we gather in this sanctuary again, we will celebrate Christ's victory over the grave. Death could not stop His revolution of love. The grave could not hold the Savior of the world. Jesus would rise from the dead and He would receive the victor's crown. But before He wears the crown of glory, He has to endure the agony of crucifixion.

Whenever I read the account of Palm Sunday, I remember how the event is depicted in the rock musical of the 1970's *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In *Superstar*, on Palm Sunday the crowd sings, "Christ, you know I love you. Did you see I waved? I believe in you and God. Tell me that I'm saved."

And I wonder, is that all the commitment that some people have toward Jesus?

"Christ you know I love you? Did you see I waved?"

For Jesus, there is no crown without a cross. And to those who wanted to be his followers Jesus said, "Take up *your* cross, and follow me."

Let us pray: "Lord God, help us to be aware of all that Jesus did for us on that cross on Golgatha's hill. If the gory details of his brutal death disturb us, remind us of the terrible price you had to pay for our salvation. And may our own commitment to Jesus be more than merely a wave. Teach us what it means to "take up our own cross and follow." Be with us this Holy Week, that we may enter into the passion of our Lord, and give you all of the praise and the glory and the honor. In his holy name we pray. Amen."