

The First Palm Sunday

A Story by Rev. Andrew Dibb

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 and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise'?" (Matthew 21:15-16)

The roar of a crowd of people disturbed Josiah. He had been sitting on the roof of his father's house, dozing in the sun. Part of him felt he should have been working at turning the dates and figs drying in the sun so that they dried on both sides. It was the day after the Sabbath, and they hadn't been turned for two days. But they were almost dry, and the warmth of the sun made him sleepy. Until he heard the sound of voices echoing around the narrow streets of Jerusalem. Sleep left him. Josiah had to know what was happening.

He raced down the ladder at the side of the house, across the courtyard, which was empty of people and into the street. The noise was coming from an area near the market place. As he grew closer, Josiah noticed that the crowds of people grew thicker. They were shouting at someone passing through the market: it was a Man riding a donkey. All around him people pressed and shoved to get a better look. Josiah spotted his friend Samuel in the crowd and fought his way across to him.

"Samuel," he had to shout, "Who is this, and why is everyone cheering him like this?"

Samuel turned to his friend, and shouted back "This is that prophet, Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee." Then he started shouting and chanting the words of the crowd, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest."

Josiah was very excited. He wasn't quite sure who Jesus was, but he had heard of Him. His mind raced over the stories about Him he had heard in the market place, how He had helped people who were blind, or who had terrible diseases, like leprosy. Josiah shuddered at the thought of leprosy. Now he could see Him, riding through the streets, with the people cheering him onward. He noticed that many people waved palm branches as they would for a very important person. He followed close behind.

"Come on, Josiah," Samuel shouted over the roar of the people, "let's follow Him to the palace and see what he does."

The two boys pushed and wove their way through the crowd. At one point, they left the road and crowd and raced along some winding back streets and alleys. When they got back to the road, they were ahead of Jesus, who was moving very slowly because of the crowd. Josiah was surprised, however, for instead of going to the palace Jesus directed his donkey toward the

temple. "He's going to offer a sacrifice before going to the palace," Josiah shouted to Samuel. "Hosanna in the highest," the voices of the crowd did not dim around them.

Josiah loved the temple: it had soaring pillars, and great open courtyards where people gathered to talk. He knew the temple very well, especially the part where the animals were kept for sale to those who wanted to make a sacrifice. His father always brought his own sacrifices. He said that the animal sellers at the temple would cheat you by charging too much money.

As Jesus arrived at the temple, the crowds of people seemed to press around him. Josiah and Samuel struggled through the crowd to get a good view. It was hard to see what was going on because of all the people. Suddenly the noise got louder than before, but it seemed different: voices raised in anger cut off the shouts of "Hosanna." Josiah and Samuel managed to climb onto a ledge for a better look over the heads of the crowd.

He saw Jesus striding through the temple courtyard where the moneychangers had their tables. He watched as Jesus walked to one table and pushed it over, and went on to the next. The moneychangers were very angry and shouted at Him to stop, but He carried on. Josiah could not hear their exact words, but he could see them waving their arms about.

Suddenly Jesus lifted up his arms to speak, and the entire crowd felt quiet. In the silence, He began to speak quietly, yet everyone could hear Him. "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,'" He said, "but you have made it a den of thieves." With those words, He turned over more of the moneychanger's tables.

The crowd took up the chant: "Thieves, thieves," and shook their fists at the moneychangers. With shaking hands, the moneychangers gathered up their money and started toward the temple gate. The crowd parted to let them through, still shouting "Thieves, thieves."

Josiah and Samuel watched this from their ledge on the wall. Finally, all was quiet in the temple courtyard as the crowd of people looked at Jesus, wondering what He was going to do next. As Josiah and Samuel looked down from their perch Josiah whispered to Samuel, "My father said that these men here were thieves. Now they have been chased out of the temple. Perhaps now it can really become a place of prayer."

As he was talking, he noticed a man coming toward Jesus through the crowd. The man walked with difficulty, his one foot dragged along the ground, and he barely held himself up with a walking stick. As he drew closer to Jesus, the crowd parted to let him pass. Then he threw himself down at Jesus' feet.

Josiah and Samuel looked on in interest. "I have heard," Samuel, whispered, "That He can heal people. I wonder if He can do so now."

As he spoke, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. Immediately the man changed: he was able to stand up right. He let his stick fall to the ground with a loud clatter. Then he lifted up his dragging foot and shook it. He stood on one foot, and then on the other, and then danced a

little dance. Suddenly he fell on his face to the ground in front of Jesus and called out in a loud voice: “Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“He did it,” Josiah shouted out loud, “Hosanna, hosanna!” Then he looked at Samuel, who was also shouting out praises. As they looked at each other, they knew that this Man Jesus, who was in the crowd below them, was no ordinary man. He had done things no man by himself could ever have done.

“I believe,” said Josiah, “that this is really the Messiah we have waited for. He has come to save us. I will follow Him no matter what happens.” Then he shouted even louder, his voice carrying over the heads of the crowd: “Hosanna, blessed is the Son of David.”