

Churches celebrate Palm Sunday in different ways. At one church the people meet in a room beneath the sanctuary. When everyone is ready they emerge through a side door to process around the outside of the church. Joining in the procession are people waving palm leaves, others playing musical instruments, including the bagpipes, **others shouting and singing, "Hosanna."** This celebration has become an important tradition in various churches.

One year when Dr. Walter Bruggemann was pastor, he and the rest of the procession were outside when a young man living in the apartment house across the street threw up the window and shouted, *"What's all that noise? You sound like the Salvation Army!"* Dr. Bruggemann looked up at him and said, *"Son, we are the Salvation Army!"* **What better way to sum up the events of the first Palm Sunday than to call it a Salvation Army Parade?** Jesus and his ragtag army parade stood outside the city gates, shouting, *"The time has come--the day of salvation is at hand."*

Jesus and his twelve disciples entered the beautiful city of Jerusalem. And from where they stood, they had the perfect view point—they could see for miles in all directions. The city seemed so peaceful from a distance. **From this view point Jesus realized that the end of his earthly ministry was soon approaching.** *"The hour has come,"* Jesus tells his followers. He instructs two of his disciples to go into a nearby village where they will find a colt that has never been ridden. *"Untie it,"* Jesus tells them, *"and bring it."* If someone asks why they are taking the colt, they are simply to say, *"The Lord needs it."* With that assurance the two disciples set out in search of a colt. Imagine their surprise and joy when they find the colt just as Jesus said they would. And sure, enough as they were taking it, someone questioned them, *"What are you doing untying the colt?"* The disciples replied as Jesus had instructed them and were allowed to continue without any further questions.

#### **NOTICE, FIRST OF ALL, THE HIGH HOPES OF THOSE WHO ACCOMPANIED JESUS INTO THE CITY.**

No sooner had the two disciples returned with the colt than a crowd appeared. And the crowd was in the mood for a celebration. There was excitement in the air. Some spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut "leafy branches" placing them on the road. There was singing and shouting. The people were ready for a change. They wanted someone to lead them to a better life. They had high hopes. There is something very appealing about people with high hopes.

**When Tommy Tighe was six years old he asked a business person for a loan of \$500.00.** The business person said yes but explained to Tommy that he would have to pay it back. Tommy understood that, but he had a plan. From the tender age of four Tommy had a dream. He wanted to make a bumper sticker that said, "Peace, Please! Do It for Us Kids", signed Tommy." Tommy needed the money to print 1,000 bumper stickers. He was convinced he could make a difference.

He listened to some tapes with suggestions for selling. "Start selling at the top," he heard on one tape, and that was exactly where Tommy began. He convinced his father to drive him up to former President Ronald Reagan's home. Without a moment's hesitation Tommy rang the bell and soon the gatekeeper came out. Tommy gave a two-minute, irresistible sales presentation on his bumper sticker. The gatekeeper reached into his pocket, gave Tommy \$1.50 and said, "Here, I want one of those. Hold on and I'll get the former President."

Later the Orange County Register did a feature story on Tommy. The reporter interviewed Tommy for several hours. Tommy was asked what he thought his impact would be on world peace. Tommy replied, *"I don't think I am old enough yet; I think you have to be eight or nine to stop all the wars in the world."* As a result of the newspaper article Tommy appeared on national television. **And who knows, maybe Tommy's effort has brought the world one step closer to peace.**

I believe God has a special fondness for people like Tommy Tighe, *"people who are believers"* people with high hopes who long to see the world become a better place. That's the way the people were who accompanied Jesus that first Palm Sunday--**they had high hopes.**

## **THE PROBLEM WITH THEIR HIGH HOPES WAS THAT THEY WERE SHORT-SIGHTED.**

They could not see the world from God's perspective. God had a greater plan - a grander plan than they could imagine.

**When the people along the way saw Jesus riding a colt and approaching Jerusalem they immediately thought that Jesus would enter the city to smash, shatter and break up the established order. They thought it would be a showdown between Jesus and the Roman officials. This was what they wanted; this was what they were hoping for. "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" rang out everywhere. "Hosanna" could also be translated as "SAVE US NOW!" The people were geared up and ready.**

Yet Jesus' action was a contradiction of what the people hoped for. **Jesus was riding a colt, a symbol of peace, not a horse, a symbol of conquering. Jesus approached Jerusalem in peace as a humble servant and not a mighty warrior king.** The people were so preoccupied with the notion of political and economic power that they were blind to what was taking place before them. **GOD WAS AT WORK... but not in a way that they could see.** That's a reminder to us. **God is at work even when we can't see Him.**

The prayer of Jabez moved the heart of missionary John Hyde to pray with great faith, **expecting** answers to his prayers. **As a result, he became known as Praying Hyde,** and the world still feels the impact of his powerful life.

Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman once wrote to a friend, telling of Praying Hyde's influence on him. He had been holding meetings in England, but the attendance had been disappointingly small. Then he received word that Praying Hyde was going to pray down **God's** blessing upon him and his **work**. As a result of Hyde's powerful praying, the tide soon turned, and the meeting hall became packed with people. At Chapman's first public invitation, fifty men received Christ as their Savior.

Relating the story, Chapman said: As **we** were leaving I said, "Mr. Hyde, I want you to pray for me." He came to my room, turned the key in the door, and dropped to his knees. I waited five minutes without a single syllable coming from his lips. I could hear my own heart thumping, and his beating. I felt hot tears running down my face. I knew I was with **God**. Then with upturned face, down which the tears were streaming, he said, "O **God**." Then for five minutes at **least** he was still again; and then, **when** he knew that he was talking with **God**, there came from the depths of his heart such petitions for me as I had never heard before. I rose from my knees and knew what real prayer was."

"It was an electrifying moment!" It was then that Dr. Chapman experienced the active presence of the living God in his heart and in his life.

**YES, GOD IS AT WORK, EVEN WHEN WE ARE NOT AWARE OF IT. *The people that first Palm Sunday were looking for a CONQUERING KING.*** Jesus appreciated the peoples' high hopes, but he knew that those hopes were shortsighted. God had a different plan. A plan that would change the world forever. **This brings us to the final thing to be said for the morning.**

## **IT IS EASY TO SHOUT - IT IS MUCH HARDER TO SERVE.**

*You have seen those bumper stickers, "Honk if you love Jesus."* Then there was a follow up: ***"Tithe if you love Jesus--Anyone can honk."*** Everyone loves a parade, everyone loves to get excited. Sometimes we, too, get caught up in the excitement of the moment. We are filled with great enthusiasm, a fresh burst of energy over a particular project. Unfortunately, our enthusiasm soon fades. We lose interest. It was great while it lasted but now it's gone. **It's easy to shout, it's hard to serve.**

Harold Walters was to play the part of Christ in the Bloomington, Illinois production of the Passion Play. Persons from hundreds of miles away travel to Bloomington to see the Passion Play each year. Harold Walters went to the doctor. Harold found out he was suffering from tuberculosis.

After the examination his doctor warned him, *"If you go through with it, it may cost you your life."* Harold sat there too stunned to say anything. The doctor continued, *"You should go to bed at once to prevent any more hemorrhages."* The doctor told him he should take his illness seriously and go to a warm climate. *"Can't take chances with tuberculosis,"* the doctor said as Harold left his office. Harold thought long and hard over the doctor's words. He realized that if he was unable to perform his role, the Passion Play would have to be cancelled and people would be disappointed.

*"Why is this happening to me?"* Harold pondered over and over again. He wondered if his illness was God's way of telling him he should not be in the play. Then he thought of previous performances and his many hours where he lived as Christ. *"I had poured my whole being into the part,"* Harold explains. *"I had tried to think and act like He would." Then he asked himself what would Jesus do in his situation?*

After much thought Harold decided to perform that night against his doctor's orders but agreed that after the play was over he would go to the southwest to recover.

At that night's performance Harold had difficulty getting through his scenes. Between scenes he would lie down to rest. A stage hand asked him if he could continue. Harold wondered that same thing. **His lines took on new meaning** as he was near collapse when he said, *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

*"I had to forget myself, my pain, my fears, everything but being Jesus,"* he recalled. Once he was able to do this he received strength far beyond his own strength. The pain he was experiencing left his chest. His voice became stronger. "Strength poured into my arms and legs," he said. *"God had poured His strength into me,"* Harold explains. *"For those uplifting moments His divine Spirit had been in me."* Harold would be back for the next year's performance.

**IT IS EASY TO SHOUT—BUT HARD TO SERVE.** What the people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem that day did not realize was that *God was offering them an opportunity to join Him in doing a new thing.*

Rather than smashing the oppressive government of that day, God was beginning at the bottom up to build a new world order. He was starting with a small group of men and women—"A RAG-TAG SALVATION ARMY" that would grow person by person through the ages until it transcended all the governments of this world.

**That RAG-TAG ARMY now numbers in the millions and it is still growing.** It is building hospitals and universities and schools. It is healing the wounded and setting at liberty captive peoples. *It is bringing people from darkness into light.*

*That SALVATION ARMY is, of course, the church of Jesus Christ.* That is why we lift up our anthems of praise this day. *That is why we are shouting, "Hosanna!" Christ is alive and he is still leading his RAG-TAG SALVATION ARMY until that day when oppression is no more* and everyone lives in dignity and peace and freedom together under the Lordship of Christ.

**Can CHRIST count on you?**

**Are you ready to join in HIS SALVATION ARMY PARADE?**

**It's easy to SHOUT--but what he needs is PEOPLE WILLING TO SERVE.**

**WILL YOU JOIN HIM TODAY? Amen.**