

A little boy was sick on Palm Sunday and stayed home from church with his mother. His father returned from church holding a palm branch. The little boy was curious and asked, "*Why do you have that palm branch, dad?*" "*You see, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved Palm Branches to honor him, so we got Palm Branches today.*" The little boy replied, "*GREAT! The one Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!*"

This morning is Palm Sunday- The day when remember Jesus' victorious entry into Jerusalem. As Jesus rode into the city, the people threw Palm branches before him, that is what you did when a King arrived. This day is bittersweet for us because even as we read of the celebration we know that Friday is coming. The cross is coming. We know that many in this same crowd will, within a few short days exchange words of praise to words of death. Shouting Hosanna, Hosanna and then later shouting Crucify, Crucify. This morning , as we draw our Lenten Journey to a close, as we celebrate Jesus' victorious entry into Jerusalem, I want to focus out thoughts this morning on what it means to be victorious in our Christian lives.

Billy Graham, has been quoted many times as saying that the greatest mission field in our country to today is in our local church - the people sitting already in our churches. Now I am not sure whether this statement is true or not, but one thing that

I do know is that there are many Christians who know what to say, how to say it, even how to act it, but when the rubber truly meets that road, there is no personal relationship with Jesus. “Jesus” and “faith” are an academic exercises. For many folks today, even folks in our churches, many have lost the sense of victory that we once had because of our relationship with Jesus.

Our journey with Jesus has taken us on a long and winding road where we have met some interesting people and we have witnessed some powerful events. We met **Nicodemus** and learned about what it means to be **born again**, to have our hearts and our lives renewed through an understanding of God’s immeasurable love for us and for all people. We met the **Samaritan Women** at the well and we learned about what it means to be a people that **worship God in every aspect of our lives**. **We met the man born blind and we learned a lot about the blind spots in our lives.** We learned that Jesus came to heal those blind spots so that we can see God’s amazing work in our lives. Last week we met **Lazarus and we experienced what resurrection power** can do in our lives – healing and raising up to new life some of the aspects of our life where we really need Jesus.

Today we put it all together and as we talk about being a people that live victoriously in Jesus. The first Key in living victoriously is making sure that our lives are not self-centered but rather Jesus-Centered. This sounds obvious, but you

would be surprised how often this key factor is missed. In America, we tend to say to God, *“Hey God, here is my calendar, here is my agenda... Now I can, maybe, squeeze you in here or here.”* Many folks only pull God out or turn to God only when it is convenient or useful. In the Palm Sunday story, people praised Jesus as He passed by, but many of them praised him for two incorrect reasons.

First, because of his miracles, he had healed the sick, raised the dead. They praised Him because he was serving their immediate wants and needs.

Secondly, they cheered because they saw in Jesus a way to be politically delivered from the Romans, the same way Israel was set free from Egypt in the time of Moses. Their praise was tempered with the attitude of “Jesus what can you do for me?” A few days later at the trial they saw a beaten and disfigured Jesus, a man who no longer looked like a deliverer or a conqueror. And, as we know all too well, the crowds bought into all the lies and quickly changed their position. For them it was all about me, me, me. When Jesus no longer served their purpose, he was quickly and thoughtlessly discarded.

The Jesus-centric victorious life is all about the orientation of our heart, soul and mind. Asking ourselves, each and every day, “what role does Jesus play in my every life – in my decisions, in my thinking and in my attitudes?”

A second key is that a victorious life in Jesus is relationship driven. Many of those who gathered to throw their coats and palm branches onto the street and who shouted praises did so because it was the popular thing to do at the time. At that one brief moment it became trendy. Perhaps some began doing it with sincere motives, but others soon did it because others were doing it. Later at the trial, shouting crucify Him was the thing to do. In fact for a brief moment it was the trendy thing to do to make a mass murderer and criminal their hero when they shouted we want Barabas.

In our own lives a victorious faith comes through a personal relationship with Jesus. One where every day is fresh and new as we allow Jesus to personally direct our steps. In order to have a this relationship-driven faith we need to do all that we can to develop and maintain a thriving and growing relationship with Jesus. What are we doing to feed our relationship with Jesus? Is there more that we could do? Are there some things in our lives that are getting in the way of developing the type of relationship with Jesus that we know that we want?

A third Key is that victorious faith is not swayed or blocked by our personal trials and crises. At the parade it was trendy to offer praise. Everyone was doing it. But At the trial to speak out for Jesus was risky. Possibly even life threatening. Lot's of people are told that once they come to Jesus, everything in life will go

good. There might be something slightly bad but not too much of it. So when the bottom drops out for us, we often ask God “why?” thinking this is not supposed to happen – at least not to us! If our faith is based on our situations or circumstances it will never be deeply rooted and victorious. It will always be casual. In my life I have gone to many big Christian events. Many packed large stadiums. Where the praises for God rock the entire arena. Where everyone is praising. When returning home while everyone is still glowing from the worship, I say guys it is easy to do that here, but tomorrow you face the hard task, can you do that in a world that is not all praising in fact a world that is mocking laughing and is often angry. A deep and victorious faith takes the good with the bad, knowing that all we are ever promised is that in the midst of both our good and bad; Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us. He will always stand with us.

A story is told of A little girl who while walking in a garden noticed a particularly beautiful flower. She admired its beauty liked the way it smelled. “*It’s so pretty!*” As she looked at it, her eyes followed the stem down to the dirt in which it grew. “*This flower is too pretty to be planted in such dirt!*” she cried. So she pulled it up by its roots and ran to the water faucet to wash away all the yucky dirt. It wasn’t long until the flower wilted and died. When the gardener saw what the little girl had done he asked her why? “*the flower was just too pretty to be in all*

that dirty dirt,” she said. The gardener told her, “that spot was prepared and mixed with the exact soil needed so the beautiful flower could grow. Without the dirt, the flower dies”

An important truth to living victoriously – and having victorious faith is knowing that God has placed us exactly where we are for a reason. Living in that trust, we can see that God does not cause the pressures, trials, and difficulties of life but God can use them to help us discover, refine and participate in our purpose in life. The victorious life comes when we can surrender to what God is doing and allow God to guide us and use us for God’s purpose in the places that God has placed us.

This morning we have a wonderful opportunity to take measure of our lives – especially our lives lived with Jesus. What does it mean for us that we claim Jesus as our savior? What does it mean for us that we claim Messiah as our home?

In a week our sins, past, present, and future will be nailed on the cross. Each week we gather and celebrate that we have the opportunity for a new, abundant and victorious life – a life lived with Jesus at the center.

Make sure to join me here on Thursday for our Maundy Thursday worship service at 7 pm. Friday we will be led by our youth through our good Friday worship service.