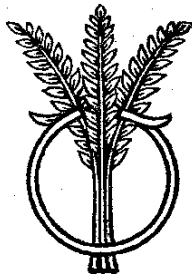


Are We Casting Our Palms Before Swine?



Sermon by
Roy L. Smith, D. D., Litt. D.

Pastor of
**First Methodist Episcopal Church
of Los Angeles**

FIRST CHURCH PULPIT — BOOKLET No. 18
Price 10 Cents

Published by First Methodist Episcopal Church
of Los Angeles, California

ARE WE CASTING OUR PALMS BEFORE SWINE?

TEXT: "*And many spread their garments in the way; and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way*"—Mark 11:8.

THE EVENTS OF PALM SUNDAY are difficult to explain. The apparent effort to solicit acclaim from the crowd, the sudden assumption of the role of the conquering hero, the spectacular parading of His Messianism, and the adoption of the trappings of power, are all so completely at variance with Jesus' accustomed reticence and modesty that no superficial explanation will suffice.

However interesting the various theological explanations may be, our chief concern in this study is not with the Master, but with the crowd.

No prophet had ever come from Nazareth. The little city was held in fine contempt throughout the land, and "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" was a common saying among the Jews. But in Jesus, the Carpenter of Nazareth, it seemed that the stigma was lifting. His fame as a teacher and prophet had spread from one end of the country to another. Even the rulers were asking serious questions concerning Him. His miracles of healing, and the even more extravagant reports concerning those miracles, had given Him great prestige among the people. His encounters with the scribes and scholars of the land had not impaired His reputation, for in every case He had shown Himself more than a master of their art of shrewd question and clever answer. He numbered some of the rich and powerful among His friends and acquaintances. Even in the Sanhedrin there were those who listened to Him with marked respect. No name was on the lips of more people than that of the carpenter of Nazareth, Jesus.

Pilgrims on their way going down to Jerusalem from Galilee that year filled all the highways. The restlessness of the people under the heavy yoke of Rome intensified

their religious devotion. Finding no hope in politics they turned to religion.

Everywhere along the highways the question was being asked, "Will Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth, be in attendance at the feast this year?" When, therefore, it was discovered that He was in the throng that went down from Bethany to Jerusalem, patriotism and piety blended in a wild enthusiasm. The hot-hearted Galileans found themselves at long last entering the holy city with a prophet in their midst from their own country.

It would be difficult indeed to picture, even today, a more beautiful sight than that which broke upon the eager gaze of the pilgrims as they came up over the crest of the Mount of Olives and caught their first glimpse of Jerusalem. The slanting rays of the rising sun leaped the deep valley of the brook Kidron, still shrouded in a gray mist, and burnished the gleaming walls of the city a brilliant white. From dome and wall and parapet the light shone with blinding splendor.

Nothing, to a traveler, is more thrilling than the sight of his destination. But to those eager pilgrims, after days of tedious traveling, the first full view of the holy city was fairly intoxicating. Everywhere there was a fever of excitement, and when someone began the shout, "Hosanna; blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord," it was taken up by the multitude until it became a veritable tumult. Little children, in wild excitement, ran up and down the way shouting the words into one another's ears—"Blessed be the kingdom of David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest." Devout women, in a transport of joy, seized branches from the roadside palms, and strewed them in His pathway while staid and sober men, now half hysterical with happiness, carpeted His way with their cloaks. Only those who have watched an eastern crowd work itself into a frenzy of excitement can understand, or even imagine, the wild and surging multitude which escorted Jesus into the city of Jerusalem.

A nation, a generation, or an individual may be judged by those at whose feet they strew palms. The shouting, happy, transfigured throng on the way from Bethany to Jerusalem, that eventful Palm Sunday, were laying their palms before the highest, the holiest and the most beautiful soul the race has ever known, and this was the beginning of their salvation, for there can be no redemption for any nation, or any individual, until life's finest palms are bestowed on the beautiful, the true, and the holy.

THE LEADERSHIP OF JESUS

The greatest problem of every generation has been its leadership. In every century humanity has been betrayed by those into whose hands it has given authority. The war lords of China, fattening on the miseries of those whom they have deceived, the politicians of Mexico and the Philippines who have exchanged faithless promises for comfortable livings, the militarists and the jingoists of every land who have led men forth to slaughter, and the demagogues who have appealed to prejudice for the sake of personal profit, place or power, have all had their prototypes in every generation and among all peoples.

We will always be governed by minorities. This is inevitable, for the reason that the few always think ahead of the many. A small group of people in every community make up the opinion of that community. Similarly, a very small group of leaders within a nation set the standards for the whole nation. A famous American said, a few months ago, that fifty men in the United States made the opinions of the American people. This ruling minority, in any generation, consists of those who have thought out their program, know where they want to go, and are on the way. It has been said that the whole world will follow the man who knows where he is going. But it is the responsibility of the people to study the programs of their leaders, discover the destinations toward which they are being led, and then choose that minority which will lead them where they want to go.

It was said of Jesus that He had compassion on the people because they were "as sheep not having a shepherd." His discerning mind could not be blinded to the fact that humanity's worst woes arise from strewing palms before those leaders who are undeserving.

As a leader, Jesus was "a man of the people" in a unique sense. He was born the son of a peasant woman, trained in toil, schooled and disciplined by necessity and reared in a country community that knew little of class cleavage. He chose His closest friends out of the ranks of the working people but He met the great and powerful with the same easy poise and graciousness with which He met the humble and plundered poor. From His youth up He had watched the bloody hand of Rome mingling with every aspect of the life about Him. He had seen His father paying almost half of the family income, some years, into the hands of Roman officials in the form of taxes. As a lad of twelve He had probably seen that ghastly highway, lined for miles with Roman crosses, whereon hung the bodies of the reckless men of Sepphoris (a village twelve miles away) who had dared to raise the standard of revolt against the oppressor.

The favorite name by which Jesus described Himself, was "Son of Man," a designation by which He sought to identify Himself with plain people. Ordinary folk, in turn, repaid the compliment by flocking to hear Him in multitudes. He understood their problems, had compassion on their weaknesses, showed them their deepest needs, healed their sick, and fed multitudes of them when they improvidently gathered in the fields to listen to Him without making proper provision for food for the journey.

His was a leadership of character. He dominated His followers by the power of sheer loveliness and kindness. Little children came running to meet Him along the way, rejoicing in the good humor that radiated from His presence. Women turned to Him instinctively, finding in Him that supreme manliness that the inner purity of a woman's soul instinctively searches for. Men who had given up all

hope that life could be made beautiful and rewarding, took new heart in His presence. Exploiters were shamed by His transparent sincerity; soldiers grew tender and compassionate under His influence; pampered youths felt a strange stirring of unaccustomed aspirations after usefulness under the spell of His words.

He had revived hope in a world where hope was almost dead. Pointing men to the Heart of the universe, He restored their confidence in the love of that Heart. He gave them a new sense of dignity—a new measure of their own worth. He had somehow contrived to implant the idea in the minds of men that all men were inexpressibly precious in the sight of God, who was their Father.

It was to be expected, therefore, that He should be the recipient of high tribute at the hands of the people as He entered the city of Jerusalem on the day of this high festival. Seeking nothing for Himself except the confidence of the people, He endeavored to lead them into a way of living that would mean emancipation from bitterness, hatred, prejudice, evil, lust, greed and all the foul moods that despoil life for even the most fortunate. The palms they strewed at His feet represented the unfeigned tribute of their souls. In Him they found their ideal and their hope. He was the holiest, the bravest, the kindest and the most courageous One they had ever known. Jesus could not have been what He was, and humanity could not be what it is, without the triumphal entry becoming a fact. *It was a moral and spiritual inevitability.*

TODAY'S NEED OF LEADERSHIP

As in Jesus' day, so in ours, life has become so *bitter* for so many! The suffering that has followed on the heels of the economic debacle is beyond estimate. But more serious, even, than the suffering is the widespread loss of the sense of security. We have been schooled in the idea of thrift. "Save and Have" was the advice of the bankers. But millions saved and now have nothing. We believed that education was an open sesame to security, but the

scholar stands with the ignoramus in the breadline. Millions of young people, just on the threshold of life, look into the future without the least hope of marrying and having homes, and their resulting bitterness is terrible. It is not surprising that there is a dire threat of radicalism in the air. It is *surprising* that the peoples of the world have been so docile in the midst of their suffering.

Life is so desperately *confused*. No one seems to be able to think through the economic tangle. Old moral standards have been discarded and nothing new has been set up in their stead. We go through life as men who have lost all spiritual anchorage.

Life has become so *empty*. The physical thrills for which we have striven so desperately, and for which we have paid such extravagant prices, have proven tedious and monotonous. When the things we owned were swept away we discovered how little we had left. Having accumulated no great inner resources of the soul in anticipation of these "seven lean years", we find ourselves now without anything to live on and, what is worse, with nothing to live for.

Life has become so *hopeless*. Millions are now on relief and charity rolls never to come off. The break-down of character and the dissipation of soul-stuff that results from such a condition is one of the major disasters of all time. Millions more have given up all hope of ever enjoying the good things of life, but are compelled to look forward to a lifetime of toil unmitigated by any promise of joy or success. In other years men might have turned to religion for solace, but the forces of irreligion have robbed great multitudes of men of that comfort.

Life has become so *threatening*. Not only does the gaunt spectre of poverty haunt the tedious days and dreadful nights, but war clouds hang heavy along the horizon at all times. Those of us who are past military age can hardly appreciate the terror of this threat to our children. They are the ones who will be thrust into khaki when the holocaust breaks upon the world. They are the ones who will be disemboweled, run through with bayonets and left

in mangled heaps in shell pits. They are the ones who will stagger out of front line trenches, their lungs seared with poison gas, their very vitals burned to cinders. They are the ones who will agonize through days that are little less than eternities, in field hospitals and first aid stations. They are the ones whose flesh will rot under blazing suns, sending up the foul stench of putrid human flesh as an incense to Mars. Those thousands of our children who "struck" last week, solemnly declaring their protest against war were not striking at a shadow, but a stern, grim, grisly, terrible reality. Every newspaper brings fresh news of the imminence of war. The statesmen of the world are talking about it. Magazines and books are detailing its causes and inevitability. These children of ours live, daily, under the dire threat of it.

Life has become so *helpless!* The very machines we invented to serve us have turned upon us to enslave us. The great economic and social systems which were to emancipate us have victimized us. Civilization, like a great juggernaut, is running wild and crushing us. Land, machines and capital—the things upon which life depends—are in the possession of a tiny fraction of the population, and the rest of us are shackled by a system which prevents us from getting possession of them. For the lack of profits the industry of the nation is at a standstill. A destitute people cannot supply the profits, with the result that factories cannot run. Employer and employee, alike, are helpless.

Life has become so *godless!* Religion requires that men live at their best—their utmost—and this is always difficult. In spite of the fact that there is a wide-spread suspicion of religion in the minds of the masses, the real reason for turning our backs on religious living is because it has seemed to be hard. Science has not driven religion from the field. Men are not skeptical because they know too much, but because they do not know enough. It is the burden of being our best that has proved a stumbling block for most of us. The intellectual problems are not

nearly so serious as the moral demands on our wills, our judgments and our self-mastery. The result is that in such a major emergency as the one through which we are compelled to live, we have no God to go to, no hope to sustain us, no faith to bear us up, no Saviour to show us the way of life.

THE PROPHETS ARE COMING

In His own day Jesus was compelled to share honors and triumphal entries with other prophets, each one of whom called himself some sort of a Messiah. Pilate released such a one—Barrabas, the bandit chief—instead of Jesus, at the insistence of the frenzied mob before the judgment hall. In our day, a host of self-appointed prophets and self-seeking saviours, make frantic bids for our palms, with the result that we are being misled, confused, betrayed, exploited and led away to disgrace, humiliation and despair.

Here comes the charlatan! With all the trappings of the great, with blare of trumpets, paid advertising, national hook-ups and high-powered press agents he storms our citadels. By grace of the radio he invades the sacred precincts of our homes and enters into family councils, even becomes a part of our dinner table conversation. "Father Divine," for instance, claims his followers by the millions and rides in a Rolls Royce. In the meantime he announces himself as a divinity and the American people listen good humoredly, contributing generously to his radio fund.

Not so long ago we were suffering from an epidemic of Hindoo Swamis, each one of whom dressed in the habiliments of the Orient, dilated mysteriously on metaphysics and the "science of the occult," rented luxurious apartments in expensive hotels, and collected twenty dollars from the gullible for season tickets. In their lectures they used the phraseology of the religious teacher, introduced strange gods from the East without revealing their sensual character even to erotic audiences, and talked glibly of "the last vibration of the seventh Eternity thrilling through

Infinitude and issuing forth in the Secret of Secrets, the word of glory, the mystic Om." They urged their hearers, mostly women of the leisure class, to "exalt the mind above consciousness and sub-consciousness to the superconscious state known as Somali, a state which is reached when we bring the vibrations of our souls into perfect harmony with the vibrations of the cosmic soul."

The business of the Swamis has fallen off a bit of late, however, due to the fact that the stock crash has reduced the number of those who had twenty dollars to pay for a course of ten lectures on such piffle. But the charlatan simply shifts his disguises, alters his price schedule, and appears as a "spiritual psychic science" teacher. And in his path we strew the fan mail, the paid admissions, the free publicity, invitations to serve as honor guests at social functions where social lions are in demand, and all the superficial symbols of high honors. What triumphal entries we have accorded to some of the more successful in this cult of cash and charlatanism!

Here come the short-term heroes! Coffee drinking champions, fan-dancers, nudists, crooners, divorcees, pugilists and pug-uglies. True, they last for only a day, for the mortality rate among heroes is always high, even at the best. And among these short-term heroes the repeat performances are so rare as to be almost non-existent. But the prizes are rich. Crooners and torch singers may hope to be paid four or five times as much as presidents, and if death happens to intervene while the hero is at the height of his popularity he may be sure of a "grand funeral" with carloads of flowers and a police patrol to hold the crowd in order and prevent them from breaking the casket to pieces for souvenirs.

Here come the demagogues! What triumphal entries they get (though we must admit their exits lack much of the brilliance of their entrances). Their chief stock in trade is emotionalism and appeals to prejudice. But what palms are strewn in their way! Huey Long files away five million signatures, each one of which represents someone

who has pledged his vote in advance. Father Coughlin, with a few months running start, boasts eight million pledged supporters. Others, arriving a little later in the field have not had time as yet to build their followings up to more than one or two millions.

All the demagogues, of course, are not aligned against the existing order; many of them are in the pay of the powerful and are lending their clamorous voices to the support of Billikin, the god of things as they are. There is no surer way to make page one of the metropolitan press just now, than to come out with some new attack on pacifism or the announcement of some new scheme for stamping out "communism" in America. Between the tumultuous cries of those demagogues who shout in defense of the "tried and true principles of old-fashioned Americanism," with special emphasis on the profits of the profiteers, and the hoarse and angry imprecations of those demagogues who demand a complete demolishing of the whole system of capitalism, Mr. Plain Citizen is pretty thoroughly distraught.

In the meantime, life seems pretty secure for the demagogue whose living depends upon trouble making. He is sure of an audience, reasonably sure of an adequate support, and absolutely sure of palms along his way, even though they are mingled occasionally with stones hurled by the followers of rival prophets.

Here come the despoilers! Do you remember the fair promises made by the liquor interests during those months preceding repeal? Do you remember how they assured us that to allow them to re-engage in the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors was going to produce revenue for the government, lighten taxes, put the idle back to work, stop drinking among young people, eliminate the bootlegger, cure all graft, promote temperance and restore the market for cereals? Even he in whom the people of the land reposed the highest confidence it was possible to express, gave us the solemn pledge that the repeal of prohibition could not possibly mean the return of the saloon.

Let me call your attention to the palms we have strewn in the path of the brewer's beer truck. In some states there are twenty times as many liquor-sales licenses today as there were back in the old saloon days. Some statistician has figured out that, at the present price of beer and hard liquors in the state of California, the people of this state have poured back into the cash registers of the liquor business twenty-eight dollars for every dollar paid in taxes into the state or municipal treasuries. Swanky hotels have turned their most luxurious parlors into cocktail rooms and are sending mothers home to the family dinner table substantially drugged. The police courts report percentages as high as seventy and seventy-two of their cases due to alcohol, with a majority of those jailed for drunkenness having bought their liquor with "relief" money. As if all the foregoing were not enough, we have made barmaids out of our daughters, and put them to the unsavory task of serving beer to half drunken men, listening to their obscene jests, subjecting them to the lascivious invitations of alcoholized libertines, and paying them commissions for drinking with sots and soaks that the proprietor may make profits.

So boisteriously do we cast our palms in the path of the booze business that we scarcely hear the warning voice of the chemist, the psychologist, and the physiologist who warns us in the most serious tones that alcohol is a poison. So engrossed are we in the triumphal entry of the liquor business that we even threaten a state superintendent of education with political oblivion if he attempts to insist upon alcohol education in the public schools.

Here come the war-makers! It is one of the amazing evidences of our distorted vision that we have allowed the militarists and war-makers to appropriate the name of patriotism.

Only last week we witnessed the student "strike," across America. It was estimated that one hundred and fifty thousand young people cut classes to register their opposition to war. One does not need to endorse the

method these youngsters used (and this writer does not) in saying they are entitled to every help and support that Christian people can give them in the war against war. Let us not forget that they are our children—bone of our flesh. They are the ones who are to be fed to the cannon when the war dogs are unleashed. They are the ones who must suffer, bleed, agonize, rot, kill, bloat under the sun, wither under the gas, crumple under shell-fire, become infected, freeze, starve, and pay the war debts afterward. From a thousand editorial columns we read that these “radicals” and revolting youth must be taught respect for American institutions. But let it be said in tones that kings, presidents, dictators, rulers and governors cannot mistake—“If these boys and girls are to be compelled to fight the wars which old men make, they have the right to discuss those wars before they are declared without being clubbed by police riot squads in the name of keeping the peace.”

Who is the most devoted lover of his country? He who would kill, cripple, gas, disembowel and maim our sons and our daughters or he who would insist upon his country making strong its defensive friendships? Yet the Christian citizen who protests the American naval manoeuvres off the Aleutian Islands is called by foul names, the pacifist is branded a “radical” and the peace meeting is called “subversive.” Meanwhile the armament race goes on in spite of the revelations that come from the senate committee room at Washington which disclose the whole armament business as the greatest international racket that has ever existed.

What palms we strew in the way of the war-maker. Billion dollar appropriations, gold braid, reams of publicity, eight hundred per cent profits, membership on exclusive boards, private yachts, political preferment and social registration.

But who can name all these false prophets who come down the palm strewn way? There are the salesmen of

hate, the Klansmen, anti-Nazis, red baiters, strike breakers, communist agitators, and heresy hunters. There are the faddists and freaks—the nudists, the Gertrude Steins, bridge experts, boop-a-doop parasites, publicity hunters, cultists and exhibitionists. What a tawdry company they are! How pathetic their followings!

In one respect, of course, we differ from the crowd that filled the ancient Bethany way. We do not throw our garments along the way, nor do we tear branches from the trees. But we do carpet their path with screaming headlines from the morning newspaper, and we spend good money for paid admissions. And paid admissions are such a confession! One sporting manager reports that one alleged athlete in this city has produced for him, this winter, the sum of \$250,000 in box office receipts. The Santa Anita race track accounts for the wagering of more than sixteen millions of dollars at that amusement center during the season just closed.

Note the way in which "good people" are involved in all this vulgarity and indecency that goes under the name of "night life." Count the women at prize fights. Note the unconcern with which we have surrendered convictions and the care-free abandon with which we have tossed aside our hard-won liberties. Note the careless way in which we drift with the crowd in religion, and accept the loudest clamor in politics.

Has the prostitute won? Are her manners and morals to set the standard for good society? Are her cigarettes to dangle from the lips of our mothers, wives, and daughters? Are her jests—ribald and obscene—to furnish the merriment for dinner-table conversation in good homes?

These are the palms we are strewing in the paths of strange prophets—imitations, complacency, paid admissions, newspaper space, radio time, complimentary attention, polite participations and social standing.

God have mercy on us!

ANOTHER PALM SUNDAY

Another Palm Sunday is upon us. It is now near two thousand years since the Carpenter of Nazareth entered the holy city of Jerusalem, riding on the back of a little beast whereon never man had sat before. And He comes again! He rides into our city again this morning. The beauty of holiness is in Him. The truth of the ages is in His words. Within His teachings is the solution of the worst ill of the whole world. He comes saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "I have come that ye might have life and have it more abundantly."

Oh, beloved America of mine, let us go out to meet Him. Come, lovely City of the Angels, let us go out to meet Him. He is the same yesterday, today and forever, He brings us fresh assurances of the love of a Heavenly Father who has watched our stupidities and shown us mercy. He comes with new promises of the guidance of God which shall lead us into all the truth we need for the solution of our problems and the healing of our wounds. He comes with the promise that, as He glorified and exalted life for Matthew the exploiter, as He redeemed life for Peter the fisherman, and as He put new hope and heart into the life of the debauched woman, so He will redeem life for every one of us.

Bring your palms. Lay your holiest and highest gifts at His feet. Strew His way with your devoted sacrifices. Shout your praises unto His name. Break new alabaster boxes of sacred purpose and let the sweet incense of your life's purest love rise as a tribute to Heaven.

These false prophets have deceived us and despoiled us, but His richest promises have been scrupulously kept through all the ages. Their fair promises have faded like the morning mist but His stand though heaven and earth shall pass away.

"For there is none other name under Heaven, given among men, whereby ye can be saved."

Make way!

THE KING COMETH!

HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!

The FIRST CHURCH PULPIT is an effort to put into form for wider distribution the pulpit utterances of the Pastor of First Methodist Episcopal Church of Los Angeles. Any profits that may accrue from such publications are used in the distribution of religious literature where it may be hoped to produce a wider interest in the whole cause of religion.

The price of single sermons is ten cents. Subscriptions are accepted at one dollar per year, the subscriber receiving at least ten publications (some of which contain more than one sermon).

Previous Issues in this Series Are:

- No. 1. BRIGHT HOPE FOR DARK DAYS
- No. 2. ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY
- No. 3. AN EXTRAVAGANT CHRIST
- No. 4. RELIGION AND YOUTH
- No. 5. THE REAL FUNDAMENTALS
(Four sermons—twenty-five cents)
- No. 6. DO WE STILL NEED RELIGION?
- No. 7. BIG BUSINESS
- No. 8. SOME SPIRITUAL ANTISEPTICS
- No. 9. THE IMPERISHABLE HOPE
- No. 10. MISTAKEN GOOD MEN
- No. 11. JOHN BARLEYCORN
- No. 12. LONG DISTANCE DISCIPLES
- No. 13. METHODISM 150 YEARS YOUNG
- No. 14. DEFLATED GODS
- No. 15. IS THIS WORLD CRAZY?
- No. 16. DANGEROUS RELIGIONS
- No. 17. WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE?

(Six sermons—Twenty-five cents)

THE FIRST CHURCH PULPIT
Care of First Methodist Church
Eighth and Hope Streets—Los Angeles, California