

Some people are so afraid that heaven is going to be boring that they're not interested in going. They hear from their preachers and read in their Bibles that heaven is a place where we praise God, where we worship and sing, where we stand before our Creator and thank him for all the wonderful things and the great love he has shown to us. Worship? Praise? Singing? That's it?!

Sadly, these are the same ideas that keep people from praising God on earth. It doesn't take much of an excuse for a weak soul to stay away from God's house. All a faltering soul needs to hear is that church is boring, and he will have all the reason he needs to stay away. All a fearful sinner needs to know is that there are some bland religious people at a church, and he will be condemning them all as hypocrites before he meets a one. All a lazy, sick soul needs to hear is that it is harder to read and understand the Bible than it is to push the power button on his 80" OLED TV remote.

Today is Palm Sunday. It is one of the greatest days of worship and praise of the whole year! It is not only a day in which we join in praise, but also a day on which we learn how to praise God and why we praise God. Jesus' triumphant march into Jerusalem is the backdrop for this praise "how-to." His humble and royal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey draws out our hymns of praise. Though many in our world would rather go to hell than to find joy in worship and praise, today we will learn to find joy in raising to Jesus our . . . **Hands of Praise.**

If you asked the average person, even the average church goer, to describe worship and praise, they would describe a scene in a church with singing and music. The reality, however, is that most of the worshiping and

praising of God that happens on earth takes place outside of the church building.

Look at our text for today. All the Palm Sunday praise of Jesus Christ took place outside of God's house, and I'm not just talking about the crowds crying their hosannas. Some of the greatest praise of Jesus took place before the triumphal march, the singing, and the spreading of the palms.

The first praise came from the obedient hands of the disciples. Jesus asked them to go and get a colt, a young donkey. Jesus told them that they would find the colt tied up in the town ahead of them and they should just take it. If anybody said anything, they should simply say that Jesus needed it. Not only did the disciples do what they were told without question, but the men to whom the animal belonged would raise their hands in praise by giving the colt to Jesus without question.

Sometimes, I think, we have a problem with the term obedience, even when it comes to obedience to God. Our Lutheran sensibilities to the law and our love for the Gospel brings us to emphasize the joy we have in responding to God with our Christ-like lives of faith. Obedience just seems so demanding rather than offering.

But don't let your Lutheran ears miss the praise. The obedience of the disciples is enthusiastic praise of Jesus! And let's face it, obedience to God is the kind of praise the Lord needs more of today, even from us. Praise of Jesus means more than saying and praying, "Your will be done on earth," while we are in church or kneeling at our bedside. It means voluntarily doing Jesus' will on this earth in complete trust of the Lord's wisdom and love.

Obviously Jesus' instructions were unusual. Obviously the disciples who were told to get the donkeys had questions. "Jesus, how do you know the donkey will be there? How do you know we can take it without asking? How do you know the

owner will let us take it?” But they did not ask. They did not question Jesus. They praised Jesus with their obedience.

Obviously, our world does not give Jesus that kind of praise. They question why God and his Word and his church have a right to tell us what to do at all. They question how God can send troubles into our lives and still claim to love us. They accuse the Bible of patriarchy when it names a husband the servant-head of his wife and a wife the cherished helper of her husband. They question why people can't live together without marriage in whatever loving relationship may please them. They question why they can't curse and swear and use God's name as a punch line. They question why church should even be a part of their lives if they feel fine without it.

But believers praise God with their obedience. Christians praise Jesus as King by the godly obedience of their daily lives. Christians obey Jesus' authority or wisdom. They live good, clean, decent, and honest lives outside the church in the world every day. They don't just say and pray, "Your will be done." They go out and obey so that Jesus will *is* done on earth. This is praise. This is worship of Jesus which pleases God.

And that's just one form we praise we see in the account of that first Palm Sunday. The next is a bit more sensitive...because it involves our wallets. Now don't get me wrong, careful stewardship of our treasures is not only good, it is the praise of obedience, too.

But there are a couple of reasons why we are so sensitive about praising God with our money. First of all, we believe money is very valuable to us, and we're protective of it. It buys us everything we need and think we need. It is our food and our home and transportation, as well as the measure of our pleasure and influence.

The second reason we are so sensitive about the mention of money to praise God is

within ourselves. We are sinful people, and regardless of how many years we have been Christians, we are by nature stingy and selfish. We arrogantly think our money is ours; we forget it is on loan from God. We do not trust God's promises that if we are generous with his church, he will not only take care of us but bless us even more than before.

But the crowds on Palm Sunday were not miserly with their praise of Christ. They were lavish with their gifts of money and material things. One person happily gave the use of his donkey. The disciples took off their own cloaks and put them on the donkey on which Jesus rode. Others took their coats off and put them into the dirt so that the donkey on which Jesus rode would not get its hooves dirty. Still others having nothing else to give cut down palm branches as a symbol of Jesus' victory. The crowds, the disciples all praised Jesus with their money.

Can we do any less? Souls are dying. Missions struggle to build churches. Churches struggle to service their debts. There are desperate needs in world mission fields. How many charities, how many ministries, how many schools could help more, serve more, teach more, reach more people with more pennies of praise. Using our hands to praise Jesus with our money—that would be real praise for the Savior King.

And, of course, final kind of praise on that first Palm Sunday was the praise of mouths. ***“Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, ‘Hosanna!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!’ ‘Hosanna in the highest heaven!’”*** (vv. 9,10). When the praise of obedience and the praise of money is there, the praise of the mouth will naturally be there too. It is enthusiastic. It is loud. It is grateful. It is joyful. In fact so raucous was the joy that day that the enemies of Jesus

looking on, seethed with jealousy as these people praised Jesus with their mouths. (And they weren't even in church!)

But as we talked about this last Wednesday, Jesus continues to inspire our raucous praise with his sacrifice, and forgiveness, and love. And not just our singing in church! Every time spontaneous, sincere praise shows itself from our hearts, in our lives, and out of our mouths, out in the world, we praise his name. As we set aside cursing and swearing, arguing and fighting, bad-mouthing Jesus' church or its members, being pessimistic and grumpy we shout our hosannas. By confessing our faith to the weak and sinful, by praying openly for those in need, by singing hymns around the family table we sing our glad songs of praise. In service to the Lord and others through the spiritual work of the church, a welcoming atmosphere within these walls, volunteering outside of them, we shout Glory to God in the highest. Yes, Jesus wants, even longs for, this praise from our mouths, our hearts, our lives, not just here in church, but out in the world, for the world to

ⁱ Adapted from *Hands of the Passion* Lenten resource for 2021. © 2020 Northwestern Publishing House.

see and hear. This is the life he came to bring...here...in joyful anticipation of the life he will bring us to...hereafter. Nothing boring about it: A life of praise.

You know, there were only two groups of people gathered that day as Jesus entered Jerusalem: those who praised him and those who hated him. The rest of our worship this week will see these diametrically opposed groups of people in more detail. And through it all, we will continue to praise Jesus for all that he has done. Ride on, King Jesus. Let no man hinder you.

Let's pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, enter our hearts as King. Let us praise you. Let our hands praise you with our unquestioning obedience. Let our hands praise you with our money, knowing that all the money in the world will not be able to repay the blood you shed for us. And let us praise you with our mouths every day in every way inside and outside the church. Then one day soon we will praise you in heaven, where our praise will be anything but boring. Amen.

Milwaukee Wisconsin. Used by permission. All rights reserved.