

## PALM SUNDAY

**THIS MORNING WE WERE HANDED PALM BRANCHES. THE PALMS SIGNIFY THE PALM BRANCHES USED BY THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM WHEN JESUS ENTERED THE CITY. THE PEOPLE BELIEVED THEY WERE CELEBRATING THE COMING OF A NEW KING TO DEFEAT THE ROMANS. I REMEMBER HEARING A TRANSLATION USING THE PHRASE “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”, BUT THE VERSE READS IN MANY TRANSLATIONS LIKE IN TODAY’S SCRIPTURE “Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord”.**

**THE PEOPLE HAD HIGH EXPECTATIONS. IS THIS SCENE SIMILAR TO THE POLITICAL RALLIES WE HAVE SEEN WHERE THE PEOPLE INSTEAD CARRY SIGNS AND CHANT? WE KNOW IT IS NOT JESUS, BUT WE HAVE EXPECTATIONS OF WHAT THAT PERSON WILL DO FOR US NOT UNLIKE THE PEOPLE IN JERUSALEM THAT DAY.**

**THE PALM BRANCH , THIS SYMBOL OF JESUS' ENTRY INTO THE CITY ALSO MARKS THE START OF THE HOLY WEEK. THIS HAS BEEN CELEBRATED IN THE CHURCH SINCE THE FOURTH CENTURY. IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD, WHERE PALMS WERE HARD TO OBTAIN, BRANCHES OF OTHER BUSHES AND TREES WERE USED, INCLUDING OLIVE, BOX ELDER, SPRUCE, AND VARIOUS WILLOWS. PERHAPS BEST KNOWN IS THE SLAVIC CUSTOM OF USING PUSSY WILLOWS, WHICH ARE AMONG THE EARLIEST OF PLANTS TO BUD OUT IN THE SPRING. IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD THIS SUNDAY IS CELEBRATED AS YEW SUNDAY OR BRANCH SUNDAY.**

**IT IS INDEED INTERESTING AND MEMORABLE THAT WE USE THE PALM BRANCH WHEN YOU DISCOVER THE FACTS OF THIS REMARKABLE TREE AND ITS CONNECTION TO OUR FAITH.**

**THERE ARE OVER 3000 VARIETIES OF PALM TREE WITH SOME THAT GROW FROM ONLY THREE FEET HIGH AND OTHERS THAT GROW UP TO ONE HUNDRED FEET. A DATE PALM THAT WAS QUITE COMMON IN ISRAEL COULD PRODUCE OVER THREE HUNDRED POUNDS OF DATES. THE OIL FROM A PALM CAN BE USED IN SOAP OR MARGARINE. IT HAS BEEN USED FOR MEDICINAL PURPOSES AS WELL. IN OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY WE TOO GROW SPIRITUALLY TO DIFFERENT “HEIGHTS”, NOT ALL THE SAME EVEN THOUGH WE ARE ALL GIFTED BY GOD. WE ARE USED IN VERY DIFFERENT WAYS AND FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES.**

**HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED VISITING AREAS WHERE PALM TREES ARE COMMON THEY TOWER OVER THE REST OF THE TREES AROUND THEM THE JEWISH PEOPLE REMEMBERED PSALM 92:13 “*The just shall flourish like the palm tree*”. WE, LIKE THE PALM TREE, ARE ENCOURAGED TO “STAND OUT” TO BE “THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”. IT DOES NOT MEAN WE ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS BUT THAT WE ARE NOTICED FOR OUR WORDS AND OUR ACTIONS. PEOPLE ARE WATCHING AND REALIZE THEY ARE MISSING “SOMETHING” IN THEIR LIVES THAT THEY SEE OR SHOULD SEE IN US. THIS GIFT IN OUR LIVES IS GOD'S GRACE, LOVE AND FORGIVENESS. PALMS USED ON THAT DAY JESUS ENTERED THE CITY MEANT FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE A SENSE OF PARADISE AND PEACE, WHICH YOU CAN PICKUP IN THE LAST PART OF THE PHRASE IN VERSE 38 “*Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens*”. DO WE PROJECT THAT SENSE OF PEACE AND QUALITY THAT GOES BEYOND ANYTHING EARTHLY? THE PEACE THAT PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING? WE SHOULD BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE HURTING OUT THERE AND THEY NEED THAT WHICH GOD HAS SO FREELY GIVEN US!!!**

**WE MUST GROW IN OUR FAITH JOURNEY, UPRIGHT LIKE THE PALM. NO MATTER WHERE A PALM IS PLANTED IT REACHES FOR THE SUN, S-U-N-, AND WE TOO REACH FOR THE SON, S-O-N. WHEN OUR “STORMS” COME**

**WE CAN STAND TALL AND NOT BREAK** BECAUSE WE HAVE SHED THOSE THINGS THAT DO NOT MAKE US “STRONG IN THE LORD”. **WE DEEPEN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM AND WE ARE LESS VULNERABLE TO TEMPTATIONS THAT COME OUR WAY.** WE GET THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES ARE GOTTEN THROUGH BECAUSE WE HAVE HOPE AND LEAN ON THE LORD.

ONE OF THE STRIKING TRAITS WE NOTICE MOST **ABOUT PALMS IS THE BRANCHES ARE ALL AT THE TOP. PALMS SHED AS THEY GROW AND WE TOO MUST SHED THOSE THINGS THAT WE DON'T NEED IN ORDER TO GROW.** BY SHEDDING SUCH THINGS THE PALM IS THINNER AND WHEN THE WIND BLOWS THERE IS NOT MUCH FOLIAGE TO BUFFET THE WIND AND **AFTER MANY A STORM, PALM TREES ARE THE ONLY TREES STANDING.** PSALM 37:23-24 SAYS “*The valiant one whose steps are guided by the Lord, who will delight in his way may stumble but will never fall for the Lord holds his hand*” IN TROUBLED TIMES **WE MAY BEND, WE MAY EVEN SWAY, BUT NEVER BREAK.**

**A PALM TREE IS KNOWN FOR ITS USEFULNESS.** EVERY PART OF IT IS USED WHETHER IT BE FOR ROOFING OR MEDICINE OR SUBSTANCE THAT THE TREE PRODUCES. IF WE REMEMBER THE VERSES FROM MARK ABOUT LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES AND JESUS CAME TO SERVE NOT BE SERVED THEN WE CAN COME TO KNOW THAT WE ARE HERE TO HELP OTHERS. **WE CAN BE USEFUL IN SO MANY WAYS AND PLACES, BUT ONLY IF WE ARE OPEN TO IT AND MAKE OURSELVES AVAILABLE.** WE CAN FEED OTHERS, TEACH, RECONCILE, LOVE, AND NUMEROUS OTHER MINISTRIES. IN I CORINTHIANS 10:33 PAUL TALKS OF “*I do not seek my own interest, but that of many, this is: that they may be saved*”. **WHAT ARE WE DOING - AFTER ALL - SOMEWHERE IT SAYS “MAKE CHRIST KNOWN IN THE COMMUNITY”.**

**THE PALM TREE IS BASICALLY GREEN ALL YEAR LONG. LIFE FLOWS UP FROM ITS ROOTS TO NOURISH THE WHOLE TREE.** EPHESIANS 4:14 SAYS IT WELL “We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.” **WE ARE UNCHANGED BEING ROOTED IN THE LORD AND HAVING FAITH AND HOPE IN TOMORROW NO MATTER WHAT IT MAY BRING.**

**DID YOU KNOW THAT A PALM TREE CANNOT BE GRAFTED INTO ANOTHER PALM TREE?** OTHERWISE IT WILL DIE BECAUSE OF ITS UNIQUE IDENTITY. **WE TOO HAVE AN IDENTITY WITH CHRIST AND CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS. WHEN WE ACCEPT CHRIST WE INDEED ARE A NEW CREATION, BUT ONLY HAVE IDENTITY IN CHRIST.**

EVERYONE HAS SEEN THE PICTURE OF THE **OASIS IN THE DESERT, RECOGNIZED BY THE PALMS SURROUNDING IT.** THE THIRSTY PARTY KNEW THERE WAS LIFE-SAVING WATER THERE! WE TOO AS DISCIPLES KNOW WHERE THE **ONLY “LIVING WATER”** IS LOCATED IN THE DESERT OF LIFE. **WE CAN LIKE THE PALM POINT TO THE LOCATION OF THE LIVING WATER, JESUS CHRIST. WHEN WE FORM A COMMUNITY OF FAITH LIKE CENTENNIAL WE BECOME AN OASIS.** WE ARE A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE MAY COME AND BE REFRESHED, HEALED, AND FORGIVEN. WE MAY NOT BE A STARBUCKS OR A COKE, BUT WE CAN PROVIDE THE “REAL THING”!!!!

AS JESUS TOLD THE WOMAN AT THE WELL, I WILL **GIVE HIM WATER AND HE WILL NEVER THIRST, BUT IN HIM A WELL SPRING UP TO ETERNAL LIFE. NOW THAT IS AN OASIS!!!** LOOK AT THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION, PEOPLE LOOKING SOMEWHERE AT SOMEONE FOR HOPE IN A DESERT OF ANGER AND FRUSTRATION. WE CAN POINT TO THAT OASIS WHERE “LIVING WATER” IS THAT CAN PROVIDE REST AND HOPE KNOWING WHO REALLY IS IN CONTROL OF THINGS.

**PALM TREES CAN WITHSTAND ABUSE BECAUSE THEIR LIFE IS ON THE INSIDE. MANY NORMAL TREES IF DAMAGED ON THE OUTSIDE WILL DIE BECAUSE OF ITS VULNERABILITY - NOT THE PALM. WE HAVE LIFE WITHIN TOO, FREED FROM SIN. THIS BODY MAY SUFFER ON THE OUTSIDE, BUT LIFE GROWS INSIDE FROM THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. THE HEART OF THE PALM IS THE SOFTEST PART OF THE TREE. OUR HEART IS SOFTEST WHEN WE ALLOW CHRIST TO BE ITS RULER.**

**NOW HERE IS A FACT ABOUT THE PALM TREE THAT SHOULD SPEAK TO MANY OF US, THE OLDER A PALM TREE GETS, THE SWEETER THE FRUIT!!! NOW CAN YOU ANSWER THE QUESTION "ARE YOU SWEETER TODAY THAN YESTERDAY?" MAYBE, JUST MAYBE WE HAVE STOPPED GROWING IN CHRIST.**

**WE CANNOT BELIEVE WE HAVE REACHED PERFECTION AS JOHN WESLEY CALLED IT, FOR HIM IT WAS A LIFE LONG PROCESS OF DO GOOD, DO NO HARM, AND LOVE AND KNOW GOD. IF WE ARE NOT IN HIS WORD HOW IN THE WORLD DO WE KNOW HIM? IF WE DON'T GATHER TO LEARN FROM HIS WORD HOW DO WE GROW. BEING A DISCIPLE IS NOT A LONE RANGER PROPOSITION, YOU AND I NEED COMMUNITY IN ORDER TO GROW?**

Long, long ago there was a young palm tree who lived in the desert. She loved life, and looked forward to experiencing everything that came her way. She felt joy in each sunrise as the first rays of sunlight touched her branches, she was happy when birds came to rest in her shade as the day grew hotter, she danced in the desert winds that blew through her leaves, and she listened with a grateful heart to the silence of the night. She thanked God for the gift of being alive.

One day a man passed by. He had run away from a nearby town where people had cheated him, and now he boiled with anger as he crossed the pitiless heat of the desert without food or water. In his fury he resented the youth and happiness of the palm tree, and shouted at her; "Hey, you, palm tree, why should you be so happy when I am so miserable? If I have to suffer, then you will suffer, too". On saying that, he picked up a big, heavy stone and slammed it down on top of the tree's trunk. The palm tree could hardly breathe as she watched the man running away, still grumbling about his life. For a long time she did nothing, hoping every minute, every hour, every day that the pain would finally stop. Overwhelmed by these feelings of helplessness, she drifted off into sleep. But when she woke up the next morning, she knew that something had changed. At first she didn't know what it was, but then she realized she could feel cold, nourishing water coming up through her roots into her trunk, soothing her and easing the pain. She tried to understand what was happening, and then she realized - the weight of the stone, as it had been crushing her, had also pushed her deeper into the earth, until finally she had reached an underground stream. Its restoring powers gave her a moment of renewed hope, and she felt strength coming back into her branches. Although she could still feel the stone, as heavy as before, she was once again able to feel the power to grow pulsing inside her. The water continued to nourish the palm tree, and enabled her to grow until she became one of the biggest trees in the desert. All the while she carried the stone, it's weight always there, sometimes hurting more and

sometimes less, until she learned to accept it as a part of herself, and embrace the stone with her leaves as if she were protecting her most vulnerable, most painful part. Despite the stone, she learn to feel joy again, and to feel happiness when birds came to rest in her lush, inviting branches, and people sheltered beneath her from the sandstorms that ravaged the desert. Once again, she felt deeply grateful for the gift of her life.

**WE GO BACK TO THE FIRST VERSE MENTIONED IN TODAY'S MESSAGE FROM PSALM 92:13 "*The just shall flourish like a palm tree*". THIS PALM SUNDAY ARE YOU FLOURISHING, ARE WE, CENTENNIAL FLOURISHING? ARE WE LIKE THE PALM, OUR HEART THE SOFTEST PART BECAUSE JESUS IS THERE? CAN WE "HOLD UP" IN LIFE'S STORMS AND DIFFICULT TIMES? ARE WE LETTING GOD USE US TO REACH OTHERS? ARE WE LIVING A LIFE WORTHY OF STANDING OUT?**

**THESE ARE TRAITS OF THE PALM TREE THAT SHOULD BE TRAITS OF OUR LIFE, OUR SPIRITUAL WALK. MAY WE ON THIS PALM SUNDAY BECOME LIKE THE THE PALM TREE AND WITH OUR BRANCHES PRAISE HIM WHO CAME IN THE NAME OF THE LORD. AMEN.**