

Preached by Dr. Carl Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA
March 16, 2008
Palm Sunday

Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 27:11-54

THE MYSTERY COMES TO LIGHT IN US

Yes, that's a long reading, but it's the story that defines us. In it is THE WORD which makes the difference in our lives. Today we move from that joyous parade with all the palms to the crown of thorns. We remember what happened in Jesus' life in much the same way that we remember significant events in our own life history.

I don't know if you remember where you were when Princess Diana was killed, but I'm willing to predict that you knew where you were when she married Prince Charles. I know it's sad to think about that awesome wedding given the marriage that followed. It's even sadder to think about because we probably don't remember where we were when we received news of her death. But that day, when all the media seemed to focus on a fairytale come true, we were fascinated by royal majesty, by pomp and circumstance, by all that surrounded that wonderful event.

We were still in seminary, it was after my first year, and we watched the wedding of the century occur at a camp where Stacy and I were directors. I never pretended that I had the qualifications at that time to be a camp director; we were hired because of Stacy. She was waterfront director, and I was camp director, which mostly meant that I tried to keep the staff happy and healthy, especially the kitchen staff. (You see, if the kitchen staff isn't happy and healthy at camp, neither is any one else.) In order to see that wedding, we gathered the interested counselors and a few brave campers in one room and woke up at 4:00 in the morning. We had to put tin foil on the rabbit ears of the little battery-powered television. We were glued to all that was taking place and it was worth it to see.

This Palm Sunday, people have come out to see the majesty—the pure, awesome display of power that they had seen before in the miracles of Christ. He is their King of kings, he is their Lord of lords and he is parading, leading them. But how does that mystery, how does that power come to light in us? On Palm Sunday, as much as any time, we are offered a choice. We either become part of what Jesus is doing and where he is going; we either learn to serve and practice the obedience that he practiced; or we simply stay in the crowd, waving our hands and making noise.

As much as any other Sunday, this day reminds us that we are given a choice to stand and watch or to become one of Jesus' recruits. We can choose to be sometime-servers, who show up for the parade, or we can choose to be constant companions. We can reject the message that this world screams at us through the media, a message that is a barrage daily for opportunities to be happy, satisfied, forever young, and of course, thin and beautiful. And that is the message that often captures our energy. Do you know people who spend their lives in just that way, consumed by what they eat or drink or

drive or wear? Is it possible that we have allowed life to become reduced to the pursuit of our next vacation?

This year during Lent, we have studied and prayed, and discussed and contemplated what is to be the outcome of our choices. And we have remembered that we choose very often to be nothing more than noisy bystanders cheering Jesus on from the crowd. And that it takes genuine discipline, effort, and practice to surrender our loyalties to the one who began at the moment of his death to recite the 22nd Psalm, a Psalm that begins, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" A psalm of heartache, a psalm that continues at the end to say, "I shall live for him, posterity will serve him, future generations will be told about him and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it."

So, on this Sunday, which will it be: noisemakers who stand on the curb, or people who make a vow and then pay the price that all sacred vows exact: obedience and disciplined discipleship? Which will it be this Palm Sunday?

Amen.