

The Palms.

Text: John 12:12-13, Psalm 92:12a

Suggested Hymns:

733, 86, 7, 348, 214T226

- 1) There are many varieties
- 2) Growth is dependant on the heart
- 3) Pure in its growth
- 4) Growth is always upwards
- 5) Exceedingly useful
- 6) Symbols of victory

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The two texts for our sermon today are John 12:12–13, ¹² *The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,* ¹³ *took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: “Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ The King of Israel!”*

And Psalm 92:12a, ¹² *The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

This Lord’s day before Easter is called the Sunday of the Palms. On Palm Sunday we think of the kingship of Jesus, for it was on this day, nearly 2,000 years ago, that Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. That day saw His formal inauguration, in humility, as King. His humanity was exalted.

Starting from Bethany, Jesus rode on a colt, an animal symbolising peace, over the Mount of Olives, down across the Valley of the Kidron on the way to the Holy City. It was the Passover week. Thousands and ten thousands of Jews had come from all parts of the Roman Empire to attend the feast commemorating Israel’s liberation from the bondage of Egypt. The city was crowded to its utmost.

Our Lord was escorted by His disciples. As He approached the city, crowds came out to meet Him. Multitudes gazed with eager eyes from lofty elevations.

The city began to resound with the cries and shouts of the people. They broke branches off palm trees and strewed them before the Monarch.

Adoring followers spread their garments on the way so that the new-hailed King might tread upon them. The shout of "*Hosanna to the Son of David*" rent the air. Jesus was entering the capital. He is making His triumphal entry, and the world is for the first time beginning, at least remotely, to grasp the meaning and significance of His person, work, and mission.

As on this day we commemorate this significant event, we shall take our lesson from the fact that it is called Palm Sunday (because palms were strewn on the Conqueror's way) and discover what lessons we Christians may learn from the palms. The psalmist says, ¹² *The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. There Are Many Varieties

Palm trees, of which there are 1,500 varieties, are tropical plants related both to lilies and to grasses. The leaves are parallel-veined, fan-shaped, or feather-like on the long stalks that sheathe the trunk, splitting as they grow. The leaves vary widely in size from a few inches to thirty-five feet in length by a few inches to six feet in breadth. The flowers are lily-like, on the plan of three, which reminds us of the Trinity of the Godhead.

So too, the works of Christians are varied, but they are all gifts of the same Holy Spirit. We read in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, ⁴ *There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.* ⁵ *There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.* ⁶ *And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.*

⁷ *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:* ⁸ *for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,* ⁹ *to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,* ¹⁰ *to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*

¹¹ *But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*

The palms of Palm Sunday remind us that we all have different gifts, but they are all produced by the one Holy Spirit.

2. Growth Is Dependent On The Heart

The growth of a palm tree is dependent upon its heart. The palm tree is the only tree that has its growth from the heart outward — the oldest and hardest wood being outside, while the newest and softest is at the centre. Many other trees can grow and flourish with hollow or rotten hearts, but not so the palm.

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree in proportion to the soundness of their hearts. How timely, then, is the well-known Scriptural exhortation written in Proverbs 4:23, ²³ *Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.*

A new heart is given to us at regeneration, when we become Christians and we become Christians through Christ's sacrifice on the cross and through faith in His atoning blood. This heart of ours must constantly be cleansed and kept clean by the daily searching rays of the Word of God and the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. When Christ thus dwells in us, our hearts will be kept healthy and sound, and daily growth will follow.

The palms of Palm Sunday remind us that our hearts must be sound through the power of the Holy Spirit and of the indwelling Christ.

3. Pure In Its Growth

The palm tree is pure in its growth. The palm tree will not mix with other trees. The apple tree, for instance, is better for the grafting process, but the moment an attempt is made to graft a palm tree, that moment it will begin to die. It is pure in its growth.

So the Lord's people can flourish only as they live lives separated from the world and consecrated to God. The moment we attempt to graft the world onto us, that moment we begin to decline spiritually, our heavenly growth is stunted, and we become carnal.

The palms of Palm Sunday teach us that God's people cannot be unequally yoked with the spirit of the world. They teach us in the most positive and convincing manner that while we must needs be in the world, we dare not be of the world.

4. Growth Is Always Upward

The growth of the palm tree is always upward. The palm tree, especially the royal palm, is one of the most graceful objects in nature. It is a pillar with a glorious capital reaching heavenward to a maximum height of 160 feet. It wastes no strength in pushing out side branches, but exerts all its power upward in one upright column.

So the affections of God's people are set on heavenly things, always looking upward and pressing onward. The righteous flourish in proportion to their heavenly-mindedness. Scripture says in Colossians 3:1-2, *¹ If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*

Like the palm tree, the consecrated Christian will not waste precious time and strength in side shoots and side lines, but will concentrate on that which is heavenly and spiritual.

The palms of Palm Sunday remind us that to the Christian the things of God will always be first and will never be side-tracked for that which is obviously secondary.

5. Exceedingly Useful

The palm tree with its products and by-products is extremely useful. Among its varied products the following are of great use to mankind.

The fruits of the palm are tapioca, coconuts, and dates.

The fibres of the leaves supply thread for weaving cloth and rope to the natives in the tropics, where homes are built and furnished throughout from the native palms.

A species of Peruvian palm exudes a resinous substance used in candle-making, and provides a valuable and durable timber.

The sugar palm, native in parts of southern China and the Indian Archipelago, yields a sweet sap from which a chocolate-coloured sugar, called jaggery, is made. From the base of its leaves, a fine, woolly material is gathered called baru, used in caulking ships and stuffing cushions.

The terminal bud of an Indian palm is eaten as cabbage. From the pith of its stem sago is obtained, which is made into bread.

The calamus family of palms furnishes the rattan canes used in making ropes and cables, chair bottoms, couches, baskets, and mats.

The palmetto found in the Carolinas, Florida, and Bermuda produces an exceedingly durable and very porous timber especially valuable for wharf building. The palmetto found along both shores of the Mediterranean produces a fibre which, when combined with camel's hair, is used by the Arabs for tent covers and sailcloth.

The fruit of the great Macan palm of the West Indies yields an oil of yellow colour, sweetish in taste, and has the odour of violets, which is used in the manufacture of soaps. In cooler climates this oil acquires a certain solidity and is then used by the natives as butter.

Truly the palm tree is exceedingly useful, and the facts emphasise that to flourish, the Christian must also be useful. At this point many Christians, it is to be feared, fail. They never do anything for Jesus, or at best do very little for Him. They never or seldom serve, but generally want to be served.

They forget that they must also follow Jesus in His service, for He says in Matthew 20:28, *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*"

We must remember that we are not to be only on the receiving line of our Christianity. We are saved to serve.

There are, of course, many different and varied kinds and areas of service, but the highest service we can render the Lord Jesus is to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit to lead some unsaved soul to rest beneath the healing shadows of Calvary's Cross.

How Christ longs for the souls of all people! How He loves them! He loved them so much that He died for their redemption. We read in John 15:13, ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.* Jesus did that. In fact, He did more than that. He laid down His life for His enemies, for while we were yet in our sins, "*Christ died for the ungodly.*"¹

And it is our privilege to be useful in bringing sin-sick but blood-bought, immortal souls to the Cross of Jesus.

We ought daily to pray:²

I long to be an instrument of Thine,
To gather worshipers unto Thy shrine,
To be the means one human soul to save
From the dark terrors of a hopeless grave.
Lord, make me useful in this world of Thine,
Let me not leave my space of ground untilled,
Call me not hence with mission unfulfilled.
Let me not die, until I've done for Thee
My earthly work, whatever it may be.

The palms of Palm Sunday teach us that we must be useful in the kingdom of God, particularly in leading souls to the Cross of our Lord.

6. Symbols Of Victory

We note, too, that palms are symbols of victory. Palms were strewn in the Saviour's path on that first Palm Sunday as a symbol of victory and triumph. The strewing of those palms signified Christ's victory over the severe Satanic temptations that harassed Him throughout His earthly life.

But these palms were also a prophetic symbol of greater victory still — a victory that He would win five days later while hanging on the tree of the cross, when He would triumph over, and conquer, sin, death, and the devil forever.

These palms, the symbols of Christ's victory and triumph, are also symbolic of our victory through Christ, our crucified but risen and victorious Lord.

In addition to symbolising our victory over sin, death, and the devil through Christ, the palms also symbolise our victory over affliction and trial in the power of Christ. Palms often triumph over the handicaps of the desert and grow in spite of the arid soil and the intense heat. One species of palm even overcomes the cold of an altitude ten to twelve thousand feet above sea level.

So in the power of Jesus we will triumph like the palms over the heat of our afflictions, the barrenness of our trials, and the frigidity of our difficulties.

You will remember that St. Paul triumphed over untold difficulties. He had *“a thorn in the flesh,”*³ which was perhaps some physical or emotional debility and troubled him throughout life. In his work he faced untold trials and hardships. He was stoned as a felon, beaten with a whip as an apostate from Judaism, hated as a heretic, shipwrecked three times, and imprisoned as an evildoer.

But in the power of Christ he conquered, and before he was beheaded, he had laid the foundation of the Christian churches across the Roman Empire. Paul was a man of palms.

Others have similarly triumphed over affliction. John Milton conquered his blindness to become a giant in the flowering fields of poetry. Helen Keller triumphed over a similar infirmity to become one of the world’s most-loved characters.

Beethoven conquered his absolute deafness to become a master composer in the sparkling beauty of the musical firmament. These and thousands of others were men and women of palms. They had learned to believe the apostolic pronouncement, as written in Romans 8:18, *¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

And also remember the words of 1 Corinthians 10:13, *¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

“All Things Come Alike to All”

In the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes we read what appears on the surface to be a rather startling statement. We read in Ecclesiastes 9:2, *² All things come alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath.*

“All things come alike to all.” The fact is that they do — birth and death, joy and sorrow, sickness and health, love and loss, happiness and tragedy — these come to each of us regardless of our character, position, or standing.

On Calvary, for instance, stood three crosses. On one, a thief profane and blasphemous. On another, a thief ashamed and penitent. And, think of it, on the third, the Christ of God, dying innocently as man’s Substitute. Strange world where three characters, so diverse, hang on the same Calvary. ***“All things come alike to all.”***

A shipwreck drowns in indiscriminate ruin the good and the evil alike. In a hurricane, the churches and the schools fare no better than the brothels. An economic disaster engulfs the honest man and the thief. ***“All things come alike to all.”***

But, come what may, if we are men and women of palms, we can, in the faith and power of Jesus Christ, rise victoriously over any and every disaster, for God’s Word assures us in Romans 8:28, ²⁸ ***And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*** And he who believes this word of God is a man of palms.

He will, through Christ, be victorious over every cross that may cast its shadow over the pathway of life. Victoriously and triumphantly he will say with the apostle as is written in Philippians 4:13, ¹³ ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.***

Yes, the palms are symbolic of victory.

May ours, under God, be a life of victory over sin, death, and the devil, over our crosses, trials, and afflictions. May we, under God, be men and women of palms. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 5:6

² Adapted from the poem called “Useful according to God’s will” in “Poems with power to strengthen the soul” Project Gutenberg

³ 2 Corinthians 12:7