

“And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples; saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them: and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.”—Matt. 21:1-9.

THE BEAUTY OF PRAISE
A Sermon by Theodor Zahn

WE are entering Holy Week. The Friday on which Jesus died for our sins sets its mark on the whole week for all who still take part in the Divine Service of their community. Only quiet communion with self, solemn meditation on the cause of the Holy Passion, humble thanks for undeserved mercies, and some thought of the day of our own death, seem suitable for this season. On Palm Sunday we also sing hymns on the Passion. How do the loud rejoicings of which we hear the echoes in to-day's Gospel agree with this? The day, whose yearly return we are now celebrating, was, indeed, the brightest festal day in our Lord's life on earth. Without any previous arrangement or artificial preparation, so it seems, the enthusiasm and love of the people burst forth, and the Prophet of Galilee is led in triumph as King to His capital. Many-coloured garments are turned into carpets over which He rides; palms by the wayside must give up their branches to accompany Him as trophies of victory. Hill and dale resound with cries of “Hosanna”; the rejoicings seem never to come to an end; they go on even in the Temple; the children also chime in. Ought we also to join the chorus, and can we? Surely we must not forget that the city of Jerusalem which Jesus entered had murdered the prophets, and a few days later brought Jesus to the Cross. How often we have been reminded that the Hosannas of that day were, only too soon, transformed into the cry: “Crucify Him.”

If that were the whole truth, our desire to join in the cries of Hosanna on Palm Sunday would indeed soon pass away. We should only see in all this a fearful example. We should be reminded of the fickleness of popular favour, of the want of understanding on the part of the great blind multitude. We might be tempted to cry out, in warning, to the few earnest Christians who in these days feel obliged once more to praise aloud their Lord and King: “Do not make so much ado about your adoration of your Lord; for in the ground of your hearts, also, dwell wicked thoughts which may suddenly turn to deeds, and give the lie to your godly words.” So, too, we should be obliged to say at last to the young Christians who first go at this season to the altar to profess their faith: “Do not make such loud and confident professions to your Lord; for how quickly the hour may come when you will deny Him in word and deed.” But that would verily be a sad, yea, hurtful speech. It would also be a misunderstanding of to-day's Gospel, if we only drew such sad teaching from it. It may be that many joined in the Hosannas of that day who were only carried away by the enthusiasm of others, but the nucleus of the multitude was formed by the disciples of Jesus, with whom were united the pilgrims to the feast who had witnessed His deeds in Galilee, and had listened to His preaching; and their intentions were honest. On the other hand, on the day of the Crucifixion, it was the high priests and their servants who first cried: “Crucify Him.” If many in the crowd standing round joined in, and no voice was raised for Jesus amongst the people, we have no grounds for supposing that any one who

praised Jesus on Palm Sunday demanded His death on Good Friday. If it had been so, how could Jesus have rejoiced in the triumphant shouts which accompanied His entry? When the Pharisees required Him to silence His disciples, He refused, and said: "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." It was right there should be this shouting. He took, also, the children, who probably did not think much about it at the time, under His protection in the Temple, and said to those who blamed Him: "Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?" He wished to be praised thus, He Himself planned to be thus solemnly met—for He sent for the ass, and made His entry riding on it.

And so it is still. Jesus desires, at all times and in all places, to be thus praised by His people; and especially would He be so praised at the beginning of the week which is dedicated to the remembrance of His death. Whoever calls Him Lord, and owns himself His disciple, must cry out to Him to-day: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who cometh to us in the Name of His and of our Father, as our King and Saviour!" May God bless the Word preached to-day, that from willing, thankful, and enlightened hearts, such praise may also issue forth from our lips! I ask—

First: *How is this done?*

Secondly: *Why must it be done?*

Thirdly: *What end does it serve?*

I.

What must we do in order to honour and praise our Lord, as He rejoiced in being praised on the last Sunday of His life? How shall we show Him what reverence and love we feel for Him? We can show Him this with all the goods and gifts that we possess, if only our gift comes from the heart and redounds to His honour. This took place in many ways even in those days. One gave his ass; who knows if he ever got it back again? The others offered their outer garments, and allowed them to be trodden under foot. All raised their voices in spite of the prudent people who shook their heads. And there were other ways, too, in which He was praised. Jesus was sitting at table the night before at Bethany. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, took a box of costly ointment, anointed His feet with it, and dried them with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. That was also a Hosanna. Mary did not think of the value of the ointment; nothing was too valuable for her when it was a question of honouring the Lord on whom her soul hung, and who had given her back her brother. And Martha, too, honoured Him aright while serving, and this time she was not blamed, as once before, for she left her sister, "so different in nature, to take her own way. The gifts that each possessed and offered to the Lord were different; but there was one spirit of reverence and love in which the sacrifices of love and thankfulness were presented, which were a joy and refreshment to our Lord on His path of suffering. And verily on this spirit all depends. If in ourselves and in those around us we see but little of this spirit, the thought may come to us: "If I had seen Him, the Man mighty in word and deed, the most lovable of men, pure and sinless, incomparably great, who bore on His priestly heart His whole people, yea, all the world, and yet condescended to the lowliest disciple, meeting all with comprehending love, then my heart would have beat at the sight of Him. Most certainly I should not have been missing from amongst His followers, when it was a question of honouring Him. But now I am far from Him, and He is far from me. It is so long ago since He was upon earth, it is not surprising that hearts have grown cold towards Him." But that would not truly represent the case.

Do we then know more of the great and the little men of our time than we do of Jesus? It is possible

that we may know their outward form and dress better, the sound of their voices and the glance of their eyes. But their innermost being, the deepest thoughts and affections of their hearts, are often quite hidden from us; and if in intimate converse they let us have a glimpse into their secret thoughts, they do not always gain in esteem in our eyes, for then we find weakness and imperfection in them as in ourselves. Jesus said words, did deeds, and suffered pain which even now lay bare, to the simplest human being, His innermost thoughts and feelings, and thus we become conscious of such a harmonious life that we cannot doubt its reality. Again, that which remained unexpressed and concealed in Him was of the same nature as that which He revealed. All, too, that has not been delivered to us of what He said and did cannot have been different from what we have seen and heard of Him. All that we have seen of Jesus and have heard of Him, makes us believe in Him—the greatest One who has ever been seen in the world. A clean heart which sees God at all times, an unconquered will which has overcome all evil in the world, and, in addition, a love for the impure and weak of will which will not cease when life ends. To Him the palm is due. Whenever His form rises, as though living before our eyes, it is but natural that we should greet Him with the enthusiasm of His disciples and His people on the first Palm Sunday. But we must not allow the thought to keep us back, that our acquaintance with Jesus is too superficial, our knowledge of His Being far too imperfect, or that besides all that, we imagine we know of Him and which draws our hearts to Him, there is much in His words and deeds that is incomprehensible to us, and therefore repelling rather than alluring. The people who greeted the Lord so joyously on Palm Sunday had no very clear and perfect knowledge of His Person and of His work. They would have fared badly, if, like our Confirmation candidates at this season, they had been examined in their profession of faith, and yet Jesus rejoiced in their Hosannas.

Whole centuries passed by during which the Gospel light in all Christendom was like a dim expiring lamp, and therefore the form of Jesus for most people was so obscured that it was almost unrecognisable; and yet Hosannas were not silenced, but much that was grand and beautiful was wrought to the glory of the Lord Jesus in music, in sculpture, and in brilliant colouring. When a school-child, in Roman Catholic countries, greets you on the way with the old greeting, “Praised be Jesus,” the thought may well arise, “What, poor child, dost thou know of Jesus?” And yet I have often felt ashamed when I have heard it, and I did not remember at once the answer that the child expected: “For ever. Amen.” There may have been much ignorance and also trust in works of righteousness in all that our fathers did to the glory of the Saviour in the Middle Ages, and yet it bears witness to the kingly power of Jesus over the godly hearts of men. The glorious cathedrals which they built, the costly garments and carpets which they wove and embroidered, the pictures they painted, the statues they carved, the songs and melodies some of which are still sung in our Evangelical Churches—all are Palm Sunday works with which the Lord is well pleased. Let any one who cannot do anything of the same kind help others to whom God has given special gifts, or let him sing the hymns which have been sung before us by others; but he must do it from the heart and only to the glory of Jesus Christ. Even if one should be born deaf, dumb, and blind, yet he could still follow the Apostle’s injunction: “Sing in your hearts to the Lord.” During these days let every one say in the quiet of his own heart: “Oh! great King, great at all times, how can I make known Thy faithfulness aright!”

II.

Is the answer to the question, “*Why must this be done?*” still needed? If on that day any one had asked the people who hailed the Lord, why they shouted so loudly, they would have looked at the questioners in amazement. I have already referred to the answer which the Lord Himself gave for His friends: “If men were as senseless and dumb as stones, God could create men out of stones, who would have hearts for the Son of Man, and mouths to speak His praise.” And when the disciples did not know what to think of Mary of Bethany’s extravagant deed of love, when Judas asked: “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?” the Lord Himself gave the answer again: “Why

trouble ye the woman? She hath wrought a good work on Me. Ye have the poor always with you--but Me ye have not always." And all others who since then have acted thus or in some similar way, when asked why they did it, have only been able to answer: "That which filled our hearts needed an outlet; and if we succeeded in making something beautiful to the glory of God, it was our greatest joy that God's good pleasure rested on our work, though so poor and weak in comparison with His majesty."

There is a time for everything in the life of man, and every day is not Palm Sunday. But wherever love and thankfulness exist, where Jesus is understood and adored, festival-days and moments of uplifting will come, in which, if only the Lord be praised, all other feelings fall into the background. Then ways and means to praise Him by word and deed will be found. We are not always enraptured and inspired, but we ought to remind ourselves that we all have good reasons for desiring such hours of rapture, because our inner and also our outer life would soon become poverty-stricken and barren, if our daily round were not now and then interrupted by a Hosanna from our very hearts. It is, as is said in the old prayer, used at the Lord's Supper, "very meet, light, and our bounden duty, that we should give thanks at all times and in all places." Yea, it is not only meet and right, but also for our own good, if we often thus allow ourselves to be filled and uplifted with holy joy in the Lord. It is good for us just now, during the quiet week between Palm Sunday and Easter Day. If we can only gaze with deep abasement of heart, and with consciences painfully stirred, on

"That bleeding Head so wounded,
Reviled and put to scorn,"

then we must also think of the palms which foretold His victory, so that we may also be able to say beneath the Cross: "He is indeed a King, though, verily, a King unlike all others."

Rulers who must break down all opposition to their rule by outward force, meet with little love from their subjects, and rejoicings over bloody victories very soon die away. Palm Sunday rejoicings are renewed every year in the community which acknowledges Jesus as its Lord and King, because He has verily fulfilled the words of the Prophet: "Say unto the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, ready to suffer and to die, and yet certain to conquer and to live." Whoever compares the words of the dying Saviour on the Cross, with the mocking words of His enemies beneath the Cross, and asks himself which gained the victory then, must without any hesitation give the palm to the dying Jesus. Only very great faith was able thus to judge on the day of His death; to-day only the purest folly can judge otherwise. It was not the wickedness of His enemies that gained the victory over Jesus; it was He who overcame evil. Even though He was defenceless when He suffered, He was nevertheless a King to whom the righteous and holy God must, at last, give all power in heaven and earth. Every one who has in his own inner life realised and experienced something of the invincible power of goodness which has come to us men through our Lord Jesus, who for our sakes humbled Himself even unto death, will be unable to hold his peace, he must hail Him as the King of His community. We do so because we cannot help it, and we will not leave off, because it is for our own good. Love becomes young again, faith grows, and hope waxes strong, when they proclaim and set themselves forth in all kinds of actions that are well pleasing to God and man.

III.

Thus we have already *one* answer to our last question: "What end does it serve if we glorify God in all our words and works?" What has already been said might indeed suffice for those cold, prudent people who always ask, "What is the use?" But there is yet another answer to be found in our Gospel. When our Lord Himself sent word to the owner of the ass, "The Lord hath need of him," this it was that above all else glorified that day of the entry into Jerusalem; and this applies also to all that we can do and

provide, in order that we may honour Him as our King. The Lord needs all, though not indeed for Himself. He who was ready to bear a painful and ignominious death, could well have renounced all claim to that brilliant entry and the fleeting joy of that hour, if He had thought only of self. And now that the angels round His and His Father's throne, praise in heavenly tones the Lamb that was slain, surely He cannot need our human hymns of praise and our feast-days for Himself? But now, as then, He needs them all, in order that He may come to His people. He needs them, that to every one of His people, to those, too, who know Him not, may be said loudly and clearly: "Behold your King." His people, in those days, were the daughter of Zion, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the whole Jewish people, who out of all parts of the Holy Land crowded to the feast. To-day the people of Christ are the Christians in all lands. There are many amongst the people of the Lord who misunderstand Him, and, did it rest with them, He would have been forgotten long ago. But Jesus does not forget those who have received His name. He causes it to be proclaimed in many ways, even to those who seem to have forgotten their Christian names: "Behold, your King cometh unto you." But in order that this may be done, the Lord needs those who know and honour Him. It is indeed right and Christian to practise humility, and not to think much of what we ourselves can do, but it is not right to think little of what we ought to do, and which, with God's help, we may do. The Lord needs our joyful songs of praise and all the visible proofs of the reverence and love for Him of which we are capable, that He may find an entrance to the hearts of those who are only Christian in name, who do not yet know Him, or know Him no longer. If our Lord declared that the shouts of the children in the Temple had power to overcome His enemies, of how much greater value must be the Hosannas of men and women. All can do something to open a way for the Lord to the hearts of His people that have been estranged from Him. Preaching and teaching are necessary, and when rightly done, they are useful too, but they are not the business of every man, and they do not reach many who yet might be won. I know men who have been so injudiciously instructed in Christianity in their youth, that they make their experience, with a certain amount of justice, their excuse for turning their backs on the Gospel and the Church. Preaching and teaching are not the only ways of winning subjects for Jesus, the King. To-day's Gospel shows us another way which all the disciples of Jesus can tread, the young as well as the old, women as well as men. We must all praise God in our daily lives, and in all that is lovely and of good repute. If we wish to serve Him in that in which He needs our service, if we wish to help Him in again finding an entrance to His people and our people, then we dare not look surly and gloomy before other men, but must carry all our cares and wants to the closet where we pray, and pour them out before our Heavenly Father, and we must walk before men with our heads raised and with joyful faces. We must let men see that He whom we serve is a great King, and that there is no higher honour or greater joy than serving and honouring Him with heart and lips, with soul and body.

My beloved, I say once again, every day is not Palm Sunday, but let the joyful tones which this day puts into our mouths, echo quietly in our hearts through the days to come. May they thus echo through all our doings till the day on which, with palm branches in our hands, we shall again greet the King with the words: "Hosanna to the Son of God!" Amen.