DO YOU HEAR WHAT THESE CHILDREN ARE SAYING?
1. Understand these wonderful things
2. Join them in their song of praise

There was a pastor who had a hectic Sunday morning. His 7 year old son could not find his belt. He and his wife looked for it, but they could not find it either. The pastor was getting more and more frustrated as the clock kept running and he was going to be late for church. Then his son asked a simple question: Dad, have you prayed about it? That question knocked the wind right out of the pastor’s sails. Who had spent the last 7 years teaching his son to pray when he was in need? And who remembered to apply that lesson in a moment of frustration?

During our midweek Lent services this year, we have been looking at the ironies of the passion. Irony is an outcome that’s the opposite of what you might expect. You would not expect a child to take a pastor to school on such a basic matter of faith, but that is what the Scriptures say about children and their faith. Today is Palm Sunday. We just sang: Hosanna, Loud Hosanna. Let’s consider the incident that inspired that hymn and see the irony in the question Jesus’ enemies asked: DO YOU HEAR WHAT THESE CHILDREN ARE SAYING?

Matthew begins: But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things Jesus did. What are these wonderful things? Things that caused people to be amazed. Jesus did things on this day that caused people to be amazed, that caused them to praise God for his blessings.

What things were so wonderful? The triumphal entry into Jerusalem certainly caused people to sit up and wonder. But this incident in text actually happened the next day, on Monday of Holy Week. Although not obvious from Matthew’s account of it, Mark makes it clear that on that Monday, Jesus went to the temple and found money changers and merchants.

This was Passover week. God’s law required every Jewish male to come to Jerusalem to celebrate this festival. Jews came from all over the Roman world. God allowed those who came from far away to buy their lambs for the Passover meal at the temple. However, the priests were in charge of the currency exchange and it allowed them to manipulate the exchange rates and make more money. The merchants overcharged for the lambs. It was kind of like buying a hot dog at a football game. It costs a whole lot more there than it does at the grocery store.

The money changers and merchants were cheating the people and priests were getting a cut. So Jesus drove out the money changers and merchants and he called them thieves. This was actually the second time he did this. The first time was at the beginning of his ministry. Now Jesus repeated this action at the end. That was the first wonderful thing - the first amazing thing - he did that day.

Matthew then writes: The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. Jesus had been healing people for three years. Yet he did it one last time before his ministry ended.

And there was even a third wonderful thing, a third miracle Jesus did that day. He called forth a response of faith. Children were shouting in the temple courts: Hosanna to the Son of David! Obviously, they had marched the day before with the crowds that waved their palm branches and spread their cloaks and welcomed Jesus. They were still singing the praises that had excited them so much the day before. All three of these wonderful things meant the same thing: Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. All the amazing things Jesus did were messages that said: See! The One you have been waiting for is here!

The children understood that! Hosanna means to save. It was the traditional welcome cry for the promised Savior. The Son of David was the title of the King who was coming to set God’s people free. That is what these children shouted to Jesus, but they did not say those things on their own. The Holy Spirit was working that day to bring forth the fruits of faith. That is not ironic. We expect God to work through his Word to change hearts and open mouths. The irony lay on the
other side. Matthew writes: **But when the ch priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were indignant.**

These religious leaders were the experts who spent their days reading the Bible. However, when these things happened just like God promised they would in the Old Testament - when the Savior came - they did not recognize him. They were angry that other people were claiming he was the Messiah.

Children knew their Savior while the theologians did not. Sadly, it is no different today. The intellectuals of our society smirk at **foolish** people like us who need to believe in a heaven. People who do not believe in Jesus think we are just stupid. What is really sad about the Christian church in the 21\(^{st}\) century is that a large number of pastors and professors do not even believe in Jesus anymore - at least not the way these children did. They do not believe God became man to take away our sins. They do not accept a Savior who died and rose to give us eternal life. They deny that God prophesied in the Old Testament that this Savior would appear. That is sad because God lays it all out before them in his Word, but all over the world, people refuse to see it. Why?

They do not see it because they do not want to believe it. People today will believe almost anything: whether it is reincarnation or that God talks to us through our feelings. But to say that God came down to earth to pay for our sins with his own blood so that we will not go to hell - not that! Why not? Because that would mean there is really a God who is a judge. That would mean there is an absolute standard of right and wrong that every person must submit to or suffer the consequences. People today do not buy that. They think right and wrong really mean what is best for them in any given situation. Eternal standards, absolute rules - people today do not want that because it would mean that some people are, in fact, wrong. It would mean that people are guilty and deserve to suffer in hell forever.

But simple Christians the world over see Jesus with the faith of a child. They recognize the Savior who came to give us peace. They know the only answer for the guilt we feel over our sin and for the hurt and sadness that sin causes in our lives is Jesus. That means that there is absolute right and wrong. Sin is rebellion against God. The simple, humble Christian has no problem saying: **I have sinned against God over and over again in my life.** However, Jesus rode into Jerusalem to be our Sav. Palm Sunday is the beginning of the end of Jesus’ life. Five days after the crowds of people welcomed him, some of those same people were chanting: **Crucify him!** How is that for irony?

Jesus wanted that to happen. He wanted the Romans to nail him to a cross. He wanted to hang there and be abandoned by God. Jesus wanted to die. Why? Because we have broken God’s laws and that was the only way to erase our record of sin. Unless Jesus hung on that cross and felt his Father’s wrath, unless Jesus suffered hell and punishment on Good Friday, all people would be doomed to hell. So Jesus rode into Jerusalem, and on the next day, he healed the sick, cleansed his Father’s house, and inspired the children to sing their song of praise so that untold generations of Christians would see their Savior and trust that he has taken their place. He has paid for our sins. God has forgiven us. God has given us eternal life. My friends, do you hear what these children are saying? Understand these wonderful things!

**Do you hear what they are saying?** That question often means someone is in trouble or some kind of rebuke. That is what it was when the Jewish leaders confronted Jesus. **Do you hear what these children are saying?** These men were horrified that Jewish children would call Jesus the Messiah. They actually thought Jesus would be embarrassed enough to silence the children. But again, they failed to understand God’s plan. Jesus replied: **Yes, have you never read, From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?** Jesus not only heard what they were saying, but he approved of it. This was exactly what God wanted to happen.

Jesus quoted Psalm 8 - a Psalm that most Jews recognized as a prophecy about the coming Savior. In that Psalm, God taught his people that he treasured the praise of children because it comes from faith. So when Jesus quoted it, he left his enemies sputtering. They did not
know what to say. Then he left them. But he had given them something important to think about, namely, that it is the faith of a child that brings forth the praise God is looking for.

God ordains praise from children’s lips. What does that mean? Going back to that pastor and his son and the prayer for the belt, it is God who causes things like that to come out of our children’s mouths. Through their baptisms and through the gospel message they hear in church, in Sunday School and at home, God reaches into their hearts and fills them with joy in their Savior and confidence in his promises.

Why didn’t that pastor lead his family to pray in that minor crisis? Why did the words come from a child? Because we adults often poison our own faith with our reason. We limit our faith by our assumptions: God is not going to get involved in something so trivial. But children take God at his Word. When parents, Sunday School teachers and pastors teach children that God answers all our prayers and can go to him when we need help, those children take our words to mean exactly what they say. They teach every one of us a lesson about limiting our trust to the things we think God will deal with.

Where can we adults get faith like little children? Only in one place - the gospel. The gospel comes to us in the Word and in the sacraments. The message that our Savior died and rose for us and that we are forgiven is the gospel. Every promise that Jesus works for us, that he helps us, and that he loves and cares for us is the gospel. From that gospel comes first a change in our hearts. God gives us faith. Every time we hear that gospel message, God renews and strengthens that faith. And through that gospel comes a change in our lives. God calls forth our praise.

We praise God in all the ways we trust him, in all the times we turn to him and ask him to help us. We praise God when we lift up our voices and sing to our Savior who has loved us and changed us and made us his. We praise God in every way we serve him with our lives.

My friends, praise him! Praise him because you are his. The beauty of this lesson is that God reminds us that he himself is the source of our praise. He ordains praise from our children and even from us adults. Do you hear what these children are saying? Join them in their song of praise! Amen.

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