

PALM SUNDAY
April 7, 1968

Sermon by the Very Rev. William A. Dimmick, Dean, St. Mary's Cathedral
Memphis, Tennessee

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

It is with great sadness that I come to you this morning, but it is also with great love and great hope. The words of a hymn have been very much in my heart and mind. I say them for myself, but I believe that I say them for many of you and for many people throughout the world -

"In the hour of trial, Jesus, plead for me,
Lest by base denial I depart from thee.
When thou seest me waver, with a look recall,
Nor for fear or favor suffer me to fall.

Should thy mercy send me sorrow, toil and woe,
Or should pain attend me on my path below,
Grant that I may never fail thy hand to see:
Grant that I may ever cast my care on thee."

On Friday I walked seven blocks - the longest walk I have ever taken. It is a walk I never expected to take. It was in some ways a symbolic spiritual pilgrimage. You will never know how much it means to me to know that some of you and our beloved Bishop took that walk with me in your hearts, and I am forever grateful to you. Your love has upheld me. To those of you who think that I should never have gone I give you my understanding and my deepest love. I have you in my heart and prayers and I earnestly ask for yours.

This is an hour of trial for all of us, for our city and for the whole world. Let us make this not only an hour of pain but one of promise - out of this darkness let burn the light of freedom, life and love that shall bring hope to the whole world. I believe that with God's help Memphis can kindle that light of hope, and to this end I urge you to come to Crump Stadium this afternoon at 1:30. On Thursday the world heard of our violence - let the world now hear of our love and reconciliation. Let us join this afternoon a March that was begun a long time ago when a man on a donkey entered Jerusalem. Before he entered the city he wept over the city. When he entered the crowds shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest". A few days later the crowd shouted, "Crucify him, crucify him". One must if he can obey not the voice of the crowd, but the voice of God. Jesus was a man who above all men obeyed the voice of God, His Father and the Father of all men.

On this Palm Sunday we would above all else remember the events and the Person of the first Palm Sunday. What about the strange procession

of Palm Sunday? What about a King who entered his city on a borrowed donkey? He was a man of great humility. He did not enter the city as a mighty conqueror but as a humble servant. He did not find his strength in position but in dedication. He came to save the whole world and all men. He had once said - "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." He fulfilled what he had read.

It has been a long journey since that day. It was a journey that came to Calvary - passed through Joseph's tomb, and to this journey each of us is called this day. The call comes to us through fire, violence, and death, but also through love, forgiveness and hope. We, on this day, hear the voice of one stilled by an assassin's bullet but whose voice comes to us again and again with a dream that will overcome hatred and prejudice and poverty to bring life, liberty and happiness to all. Martin Luther King was no ordinary man. He was a messenger of peace. It was a message which many of us were not prepared to hear, but who by God's grace may speak in death even more powerfully than in life. In the grief of this tragic hour let us listen to his voice and respond to the call of love, justice and brotherhood.

I believe that the Lord truly doth wait outside the door in humility to usher in a new Kingdom. I have always believed this - but never more than today

On the first Palm Sunday "Jesus went into the Temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the Temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them 'It is written. My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves'." Unless we are willing to be upset and change our values we will never understand Palm Sunday or the man on the donkey, and the chances are that neither will we respond to the salvation of God in Christ.

For more than eight weeks I have been involved in the pain of our city in the sanitation dispute, trying desperately to be a humble instrument of reconciliation. I know that there are many agents of reconciliation in this city. There are many people of good will in this city of every color and creed. It is this good will which will bring peace and hope to our strife and sorrow. I ask your prayers for our city, the mayor and council, men of labor, and upon all of us, men of every race and station.

In this, our Good Friday, let us look through our tears to Easter Day and the glorious Resurrection in whose life we are all given new

life. We come today in grief - we come today to confess our sins - not the sins of others but our sins. And we come seeking the hope of a better world.

These have been difficult days for me as they have been for all of us. We have been confused and bewildered - we never thought it would happen here - but it has. Whatever we had to do or not to do with the climate of the past, we can with God's help have something to do with the climate of the present and the future. It will mean that we must be changed in our hearts and minds and lives. Much has been done, but let us do more and better things. I plead with you to be agents of transforming love. The story of Pontius Pilate is a story addressed to each one of us. I address the story to myself and to myself alone, unless you care to embrace it for yourself, but please do not embrace it for anyone else.

Pilate inscribed Jesus' cross in Hebrew, Greek and Latin - in these three languages men called Him King. The Jewish leaders repeatedly asked him to remove the inscriptions and Pilate refused. He said, "What I have written I have written". He was adamant about the inscription. He refused to remove it. He was weak about the decision of the Cross. He was firm about the inscription, but vacillated about as to whether to crucify Jesus or let Him go. William Barclay in his commentary "The Gospel of John" writes: "It is one of the curious paradoxical things in life that we can be stubborn enough about things which do not matter, and weak enough about things which are of supreme importance. We can dig our heels in and refuse to budge an inch about some trifle which is of no importance, and we can weakly give way on some issue which involves the greatest principles in life. Pilate might have gone down in history as one of the great strong men. But because he yielded on the great thing, and stood firm on the unimportant thing, his name is the name of shame. Pilate was the man who took a stand - on the wrong things and too late."

I do not want to be like Pilate and to stand for the wrong things. Let us not be in this tragic hour like Pilate. Let us stand for the right things and do the right things - whatever the cost to our pride and prejudice - that this moment which is one of our darkest may become one of our brightest. Let us light a lamp of hope and reconciliation. I have wanted to be that kind of light. I have wanted the Cathedral to be the place of that kind of light. Coventry Cathedral in England took a charred cross and the words "Father Forgive", and has been a center of reconciliation. I believe that our city wants to light that lamp of hope. The whole world hungers for the lamp of hope. Let these not be words alone, but let us put them into action. I call upon you that we make of this Cathedral Church what we know it ought to be in terms of race and riches, people and poverty, prayer and program. I cannot call upon all the churches of Memphis but I do - to be the Body of Christ. We can be no more

but surely let us be no less.

"O Sion, haste, thy mission high fulfilling,
To tell to all the world that God is Light;
That he who made all nations is not willing
One soul should perish, lost in shades of night.

Proclaim to every people, tongue, and nation
That God, in whom they live and move, is Love;
Tell how he stooped to save his lost creation,
And died on earth that man might live above.

Give of thy sons to bear the message glorious;
Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way;
Pour out thy soul for them in prayer victorious
Till God shall bring his kingdom's joyful day.

Publish glad tidings: Tidings of peace,
Tidings of Jesus, Redemption and release. "

This is a day of mourning but it has within it the signs of life and resurrection. I said last Sunday - and I repeat - this is not a time for blame fixing but it is a time to face our own involvement and to take up our responsibility. [When all else is forgotten let us pray that we will be remembered as the people and place who care in an hour of darkness.] One of the earliest stories in my family that I can remember is the story of Sam Allen. When I was about two years of age our home burned. My brother of about five was inside. In the raging of the fire Sam wrapped himself in wet blankets in an effort to rescue my brother. What others had had to give up Sam dared to try again. His gallant effort failed, but his act of love has never been forgotten. He was a negro, a family friend of long standing. On Friday when I took the cross and started down Poplar Avenue my heart turned to Sam and to all his fellows - and for all the people Sam and I represent - and said "Thank you Sam for your love and sacrifice. My act of love is small compared to yours". It is a debt long past due, but at long last I have joined a march that started long ago when a man on a donkey entered Jerusalem. Will you join this March? - that through our tears we may see the new Jerusalem in Memphis, through our pain let us see the promises of God, the city where people dwell with God-and God does dwell with them in grace, love and truth -- in peace and brotherhood.

The angry cries of "Crucify him. Crucify him" will, when our eyes are opened to see the glory of the Lord, become words of love and life - "The Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed and has appeared to us".

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.