In his biography of President Woodrow Wilson, *When the Cheering Stopped*, Gene Smith traces the last years of President Woodrow Wilson's life. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Wilson was born in Stanton, Virginia. After serving as the President of Princeton University and Governor of New Jersey, Wilson became a respected President in war and peace. His idealistic vision for a new world order was informed by his deep faith. He was a success. But in the last years of his Presidency, his health failed, his popularity waned, and he was unable to persuade the Senate to ratify the peace treaty forming the League of Nations. Despite the adulation of people around the world, despite many personal and professional triumphs, for Woodrow Wilson, the cheering stopped.

Palm Sunday is a joyous day, as we remember that day Jesus entered Jerusalem to the cries of "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" But Palm Sunday is also a foreshadowing of the day when the cheering stopped. Today is known both as Palm Sunday AND as Passion Sunday. The palms we wear today are palm CROSSES. We cannot forget that today we stand at the head of HOLY WEEK. Easter may be only a WEEK away, but Good Friday will be here in just five days.

This last week we celebrated the CONFIRMATION of the faith of eight young people in our church, the reaching of a unique milestone after months of preparation. For these young people, their confirmation may feel like the "end of an era": the end of childhood, the reaching for adulthood. But confirmation is not the end of the line. It is just one stop on a much longer journey. A journey we are reminded of by the life of Jesus.

In the Bible Jesus is always going someplace. Going to the temple to pray, ascending a mountain to teach and preach, going for a boat ride, traveling to a friend's house. It appears that Jesus rarely stood still. He was always moving, always growing, always evolving. And that is the way life is. That is the way faith is.

In our confirmation classes Rev Smith and I stress that confirmation is but one step, one important step, in our journeys of faith. Our entire lives, from birth to baptism, confirmation to maturity, constitute one long journey. Throughout our individual life journeys, we share many events with family and friends, and each of us have those unique faith and life experiences that come together to shape our individual and unique personalities. And throughout it all, God is with us, loving us, living in us, offering us grace and life. In the words of the hymn we sang at the confirmation service on Wednesday night, throughout all of our lives, God is there…

to hear our borning cry, God’ll be there when we are old.
God rejoiced the day we were baptized to see our lives unfold

In our life and faith journeys we experience SUCCESS AND FAILURE, achievement and disappointment. Races and games are both won AND lost. Sometimes you get picked for this club or that. Sometimes you don't. And once our school days are over, we enjoy success and endure setbacks, know job satisfaction and also unemployment. Most of us find love and rejection, delight and despair. In those immortal words from the opening credits of WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS, we know both the "thrill of victory and the agony of defeat". Life is a mixed bag at best.
Palm Sunday reminds us is that life is about more than winning and getting and having and succeeding. On the cross JESUS REDEFINES success and failure. For Jesus, success is about self-giving, not self-GETTING. In Philippians Paul writes that Jesus SUCCEEDED by HUMBLING HIMSELF. And in so doing the cross is changed from a symbol of death into a symbol of eternal life.

In his Philippians Christ hymn Paul writes that JESUS SUFFERS WITH US: this man, who should never have suffered, suffered as we do, and in so doing, broke the power of death and transformed the terror of suffering. This man who was as good as God lived like us so that WE might become like him. And by so doing Jesus shows us that any suffering can be endured if only it is SHARED.

A number of years ago a fifth grade boy in Oceanside, CA contracted cancer. The boy decided to shave his head before the chemotherapy caused his hair to fall out. Then the unexpected happened. One of his classmates talked all of the other boys in his class into shaving their heads, too. When asked why they did it, the boys replied: "The last thing our friend would want is to not fit in - to be made fun of because he looked different. We just wanted him to feel better and not be left out." (LA 3:2:7)

There is nothing worse than suffering alone. But suffering can be endured if it can also be shared. Which is why Jesus suffered with us, for us.

In my ministry I have had two really difficult pastoral calls: On one I called on a dear 86 year old woman with the news her son was imprisoned for a shameful violent crime. On the other call it was my duty to tell a mother her son had been diagnosed with AIDS. The former woman was able to endure her suffering because she was able to talk about it with a few dear friends. The other suffered alone, because she could not bring herself to share her burden even with her lifelong friends.

There is nothing worse than suffering alone. Which is why Jesus suffered with us, for us. For suffering can be endured when it is shared.

One of the great works of art of the German Renaissance is the ISENHEIM Altarpiece of Mathias Grunewald. Entitled the "Crucifixion of Christ" the painting is a particularly graphic representation of the crucified Christ. The body is contorted and covered with gruesome sores and wounds.

The painting was commissioned for the chapel in a hospital devoted to the care and treatment of persons suffering from diseases of the skin. For those for whom the painting was commissioned, the crucified Christ of the Isenheim Altarpiece is not gruesome at all: his scarred body looked just like their own. In fact, the painting was intended as an AFFIRMATION of those whose lives were filled with suffering.

So also the suffering Jesus is not gruesome for us. Jesus suffered for us. Jesus suffers with us.

It's easy to be a Christian on Palm Sunday. Especially surrounded by friends and family celebrating and cheering with us. But what do we do when the cheering stops? That's when the reservoir of faith from our youth kicks in. The faith we first received from our parents and grandparents, Sunday School teachers and choir directors, pastors and elders. When we encounter the really tough times in life, that is when faith, the real faith of a lifetime, becomes the faith for the tough times of life. And that is true, no matter what your age. Whether you are a young child of the covenant, a confirmed member of the church for five days, five years, or five decades. For suffering can be endured when it is shared.

Many of you have already suffered through terribly tough times, and the rest of you WILL suffer tough
times in your life at one time or another – or for many times. That's what human life is all about. We are blessed to enjoy the parades and passions, joys and fulfillment of human life. And like Jesus, we also know and will know again those days when the cheering stops.

So my prayer for you is this: when the tough times of life come to you or when the tough times return to you - and they will come - today, tomorrow, next year, five years from now - when the tough times come. Whenever the cheering stops, I pray you will remember that the baby in the manger for whom the angels sang, the Jesus who entered Jerusalem with fanfare and trumpet, the Jesus who arose on Easter day, is also the man who carried a cross for YOU on Good Friday. And because he carried HIS cross for US, WE can carry the burdens of one another. Even when the cheering stops.

Dear friends: remember, you are not alone. God in Jesus Christ suffers with you. God in Jesus Christ lives in you now and always. And in the church, the living breathing, succeeding and suffering body of Christ, there are brothers and sisters in whom you can depend in all of the seasons of life. In good times and bad, you can entrust your life to those whose lives have been forever transformed by the love of God we know in Jesus Christ. You are not alone. God – and the people of God, are with you now and always. Even when the cheering stops. Thanks be to God! Amen.

**Philippians 2:5-8**

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who,  
though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,  

7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  

8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

**Luke 19:28-40**

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.  

29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples,  

saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’”  

32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them.  

33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”  

34 They said, “The Lord needs it.”  

35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.  

36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.  

37 As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen,  

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”