

PALM SUNDAY (LENT 6)

March 26 2017

Old Testament: Zechariah 9:9-12

Epistle: Philippians 2:5-11

Gospel: John 12:12-19

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Palm Sunday—it's one of the oldest Christian festivals.

Going all the way back to the 4th century—
when Christianity became legal in the Roman Empire.

Even today—right now—people in Jerusalem are retracing Jesus' Triumphal Entry,
of Christ riding in, on the back of a donkey,
to the shouts of hosannas and the waving of palms.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

Like the Wise Men, we have been following Jesus ever since Christmas,
as He's gone about His business of getting baptized,
being tempted and transfigured,
healing the sick, forgiving sins and raising the dead.
All of this while tending to disciples who just can't seem to understand
that His way, within Lutheran circles,
is what is called a theology of the cross.

The crowd processing into Jerusalem, along with His disciples—
observe what is happening through another perspective—
the same perspective we are prone to have,
that being what's called the theology of glory.

Now work with me...

Jesus has just performed two show-stopper miracles.
First, He fed thousands of people, until they were satisfied,

bringing Jesus to the height of His popularity.
 You recall that after eating, everyone wanted to make Jesus ... King.

Can you blame them?

Not have to buy food?

Not have to work for food?

Who wouldn't want to have a King that would give them bread every day?

Jesus of course refuses the adulation of the people.
 Telling them instead how He is the Bread of Life—
 the true bread that comes down from heaven
 and unless one eats of His flesh and drinks His blood,
 then there's no life in them.

Upon hearing that, people turn away from Jesus.

But then, He raises Lazarus.

Jesus calls a dead man from the tomb after his body had started to decay.

That miracle was the last sign Jesus performed
 before making His way to Jerusalem.

Remember, there are throngs of pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem with Him.

All going to celebrate the Passover—

which meant that the population in Jerusalem swelled—

like New Year's Eve at Times Square or the 4th of July in D.C.

My point is, there were people in this vast audience,

who no doubt were fed by Jesus, and who witnessed Lazarus' coming back to life.

The knowledge of these miracles help produce this extraordinary excitement among the people. Here He is! The Bread King! The Life Restorer!

But there's more...

There's more significance here with what Jesus is doing.

For those who knew the Scriptures, it resonates with them.

What Jesus does, He arranged.

The colt doesn't appear by accident, or as an afterthought.

Now I know that riding a colt, the foal of a donkey doesn't appear very royal to us—

If we see dignitaries, or royalty, they show up in limousines

with a police escort and a line of SUV's in back.

But those of the East assigned a very high value to this animal.

Only men of the highest rank rode a donkey—Moses—the Judges—David.

It was the ancient limousine service for ancient Israelite kings.

Jews actually preferred them over horses—

which were introduced by Solomon from Egypt—

and employed for the purposes of war (Jeremiah 8:6).

Moreover, devout Jews expected, based on the words of Zechariah 9:9,

that which was read a few moments ago,

they expected the Messiah to enter Jerusalem

riding on a colt the foal of a donkey.

So this is not some little event happening.

For those recognizing what's going on—of their King coming into Jerusalem—

they roll out the red carpet.

People take off their outer garments and spread them on the ground.

This was a mark of honor—

done before another one of Israel's kings (II King 9:13) from the past.

Others cut or tore down branches from the trees along the way, so as to make a leafy carpet before Him—again something done during seasons of rejoicing (Lev. 23:40), or after a victory (Rev. 7:9).

Nothing but adulation greets Jesus, as the crowd welcomes their monarch.

Everything the people did was an expression of joy.

The scuttlebutt became,

Would this long awaited monarch throw off the Roman yoke?

Of course He would. He had to.

Now, when walking towards Jerusalem—

Jewish pilgrims would sing what are called the Songs of Degrees,

or the Songs of Ascent—because they were headed up to Jerusalem.

When the children complained, "Are we there yet?"

The answer always was, "No—sing another psalm."

These Songs of Ascent span from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134—and Psalm 118 is included.

We're going to deviate from what we normally do this morning, because I need you to see what the people in this demonstration were chanting.

So, take your hymnal and in the front portion find Psalm 118. There's no page #. Just hunt for Psalm 118.

Psalm 118 is responsory—

In that one person calls out the first part—and the people answering in unison.
And you all are very familiar with verse 1.

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good...

And the people's response is—*for his steadfast love endures forever.*

It goes on with the same refrain until verse 5.

Turn the page and skip down to verse 19—

*¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness;
that I may enter through them,
and give thanks to the LORD.*

*²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD,
the righteous shall enter through it.*

*²¹ I thank you that you have answered me,
and have become my salvation.*

*²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.*

*²³ This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.*

*²⁴ This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

And now verse 25—

*Save now, we pray, O LORD;—Save us—in Hebrew that's Hosanna.
(Hosanna is a transliteration of the Hebrew words for "save us please.")*

O LORD, we pray, give us success. And then...

²⁶ *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!*

And all the people respond with...*We bless you from the house of the LORD.*

When a NT writer gives a line from OT, just a line, the Jewish mind would have considered the whole passage. It's like humming a couple of bars from a tune from the 80's. Depending upon when you were raised, you could probably sing the whole song.

Without closing your hymnal...

Hear what all these people are saying about Jesus—

Normally, when people respond like this, Jesus shuts them down.

But not here. Here, Jesus lets them.

He lets them chant one of the great Psalms for Passover.

"Hosanna!" "Save Now! "Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the King of Israel!"

They proclaim Jesus as their King.

The King who not only gives free food...

The King who not only heals our sick but He raises our dead...

The King who will quite possibly start a revolution—

one that will throw off the Roman.

He'll make Israel great again!

The people whipped themselves into a frenzy.

Again, before you close your hymnal—I ask you...

What perspective were the disciples and the crowd viewing Christ's Triumphal Entry in?

Was it a theology of the cross—

where God is revealed through humiliation suffering?

Or—or did they witness what was happening through a theology of glory?

Where God is the God of might, power, and glory...

O LORD, we pray, give us success!

It's obvious isn't it? They were all theologians of glory.

And so are you. It's your tendency.

To focus primarily on what is perceived rather than what is revealed.
 To think God corresponds to your experience, your expectations and your reason.

Which is why, as things progress through Holy Week,
 this King that the crowd hails,
 would end up being too humble for their tastes.

When it appears that King Jesus is failing in His mission,
 they abandon Him,
 they change their tune altogether.

Examples include:

Judas Iscariot—He's the first to bolt, betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Then Peter—Peter denies Jesus three times just as Jesus predicted.

After that, when given the choice between Jesus or Barabbas,
 the popular vote goes to Barabbas...the terrorist.

Jesus is not the kind of Messiah they were looking for.

Suffering Servant? I don't think so...

And the chants of the crowd switch from "Save us, Lord" to "Crucify Him."

Even on the cross, mockers said,

"Come down, we'll believe you!"

"Show us power—show us might and strength and we'll believe You."

All theologians of glory. Every last one of them.

And yet Jesus rides on into Jerusalem,

knowing what they were and that they would all fall away
 and abandon Him at His hour of death.

Gratefully, there are some—as in two, who do not observe what is happening as theologians of glory. First, there's the Roman Centurion who says at Christ's death, "Surely this was the Son of God." And then there's the thief on the cross—the one who asks Jesus to remember him when He comes into His kingdom. That thief, he knew that when the people shouted, "Hosanna, Save us"—that Jesus was saving, just not the way the people expected. And that when the people said, "Give us success," that Jesus was, just not in the way the people expected. Both of these men observed things as theologians of the cross.

In the brief moment we have left,
 notice one more thing contained in Psalm 118.

Remember, this is the final Psalm everyone is chanting as they make their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. Verse 27—

*The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us.
And the people say...Bind the sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar.*

Later that day devout Jews would be busy selecting their unblemished lambs for the sacrifice. But Jesus is not going up to Jerusalem to make sacrifice, is He?

He is the sacrifice, chosen by God the Father—
something John the Baptist knew when he said,
"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

The sacrifice to suffer and die for the sins of the whole world.
The sacrifice to suffer and die for all of the theologians of glory.
The sacrifice to suffer and die for you.

Most likely not one of the people chanting this Psalm that day had a clue,
but by weeks end that is exactly what would happen.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Still Standing...

What shall I render to the Lord, for all His benefits to me?

Sitting...

Announcements