

PALM SUNDAY

March 25 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—one of the oldest Christian festivals.

Today scores of 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, casting out demons, 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—
that which is 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 full,
bringing Jesus to the height of His popularity.
You recall that after eating, everyone wanted to make Jesus ... King.

Can you blame them?

Not to have to work for food?

Not to have to buy 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—of how they must believe in Him.

Upon hearing that, people turn away from Jesus. But then, Jesus raises Lazarus.

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

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

Remember, there are throngs of pilgrims coming to Jerusalem with Jesus.

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 arranges. 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 particular animal.

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

They were the ancient limousine service for Israelite kings.
 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 insignificant event.

Prophecy is being fulfilled.

David's Son is finally returning to His throne.

And 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). [See Judith in the *Apocrypha*.]

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 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.

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

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

Take your hymnal, from your recently oiled hymn rack, 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 answer 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.
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 quotes a line from OT,

just a line, the Jewish mind would have recalled the whole passage.

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 possible start a revolution—
one that will throw off the Romans.
He'll make Israel great again!
The people whip 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 and
suffering?

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!

Beloved, they were all theologians of glory.

And so are you. This is 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—

not giving them what they expect,
they abandon Him and change their tune altogether.

Examples include:

Judas Iscariot—betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.
Then Peter who 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 hoping for.
Suffering Servant? I don't think so...

Which is why 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 then."

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

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?