

PALM SUNDAY

April 14 2019

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.

Last week, we heard Isaac ask his father,

“Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

Abraham answered,

“My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”

On Palm Sunday that is exactly what is being fulfilled.

A lamb riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

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 jaw-dropping miracles.

First, He fed thousands of people, until they were full,

bringing Jesus to the height of His popularity.

You'll recall that after eating, everyone wanted to make Jesus King.
Who wouldn't want to have a King that would give them bread every day?

Jesus of course refuses this temptation—like all other temptations.
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 began 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 the population in Jerusalem swelled.

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.
And 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—
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—before their eyes.

David's Son is finally returning to His royal throne.

And for those who recognize 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.¹

Others cut or tore down branches from the trees along the way,

so as to make a leafy carpet before Him.²

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

Everything the people did was an expression of joy.

"Would this long-awaited monarch throw off the Roman yoke?"

Of course He would—

and return them to the golden age of David and Solomon.

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 span from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134.

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

So take your hymnal, from your recently oiled hymn rack, and in the front portion find 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 respond with—*for his steadfast love endures forever.*

It goes on with the same refrain until verse 5.

¹ This was done before in 2 King 9:13.

² This was done during seasons of rejoicing (Lev. 23:40), or after a victory (Rev. 7:9). [See Judith in the Apocrypha.]

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.*

I've told you before, when a NT writer quotes a line from OT,
just a line, the Jewish mind would recall the whole passage,
just like so many of you do with songs from your past...

So 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 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 are proclaiming 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 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.
 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.
 Why? Because 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."

And even on the cross, the 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 wanted. These men observed things as theologians of the cross.

Now 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...He's not going up to Jerusalem to make sacrifice.

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)

He is the sacrifice to suffer and die for the sins of the world.

He is the sacrifice to suffer and die for theologians of glory.

He is the sacrifice to suffer and die for you.

So, beloved, on Good Friday when you see Christ dying on the cross,
being cut off from God for sin, say,
"That is my death, for my sin."

And when Christ rises from the dead on Resurrection Sunday,
say, "That is my rising to life everlasting."

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.