

This Sunday's texts:

Deuteronomy 32:36-39

Philippians 2:5-11

John 12:12-19

Jesus' Triumphal Entry

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April 10, 2022

The holy gospel for this phone Sunday comes to us from the Gospel of John the 12th chapter:

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things have been done to him. Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, make that triumphal entry into our lives, into our hearts. Let our praises and our acknowledgment of you as king be true and pure and long-lasting. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jesus is worthy of our praises. The truth of the matter is this sometimes we give him that praise for the miraculous way he works in our lives, the way he helps us to reconcile with friends with whom we've had a difficult time, the way he helps his journey through grief often through the help of loved ones, so that we can kill and find strength, the way he gives us strength to get through the day. But let's not be mistaken. Let's not think of our faith in God and our faith in Jesus as a Santa Claus faith. That is a God who simply gives us the gifts we ask for and hopes we're grateful. Rather instead, Jesus comes to rescue us from those things that bind us, from those things that we cannot rescue ourselves from, our sin, our selfishness, our brokenness. We need Jesus to be in our lives on *his* terms because that's the only way he will come.

The text in Deuteronomy and other places throughout the scripture, including in our own confession this morning says this. "I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God;"¹ Now there's an acknowledgment that we look to other things as gods, but this text makes it very clear that there is only one God and he comes on his own terms. Now there's *really* good news in that because a part of those terms is this. He loves you. He hates to see you in bondage. He hates to see you broken and far away. So he will go to the utmost lengths to bring you back, to bring you healing, to bring you wholeness, and to give you hope.

We're told in the text in Philippians that to him every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear allegiance.² Our experience has taught us that doesn't necessarily happen in this life. In fact, that is actually good news for us because it reminds us that there is a new place in the end. That our hope for those who have passed is a hope that says there is a place where

¹ Isaiah 34:5 (ESV)

² Philippians 2:10-11

there will be no more tears, that there will be ultimate healing, where God's will is done perfectly, unlike in this broken world of sin. Ultimately, we're given the assurance that God wins. That's a really good thing to be keeping in mind as we journey through this next week, as we move into this Palm Sunday, where we hear the singing of praises, the hopes of the people of Israel, the parade, the shouting, the cheering, that turns later. And we discover the coronation of the king is a crown of thorns. Because we know the end of the story, we remain hopeful, through Maundy Thursday, through Good Friday, through the death and burial because we have the hope of the resurrection.

So there's always a struggle. A few years ago, I'm not exactly sure when, I honestly don't even care, but a few years ago, some of the powers that be in the life of the church, the people that put together the church calendar and the lectionary, decided that this was no longer Palm Sunday. Did you know that? Yeah. They called it "Palm Passion Sunday." They called it Palm Passion Sunday largely because they were concerned about those of you that don't come to church this week, on Thursday and Friday. They didn't want you just having the celebration of Palm Sunday and then the celebration of the Resurrection without understanding that our sin caused the suffering and death of Jesus. That this is not a cheap grace, but it is a real grace. So they didn't want us to be too caught up yet in the joy. And yet I say "to heck with that!"

First off, come to church on Thursday and Friday. Experience and worship God through that amazing institution of holy communion and the hope that is ours in the new commandment that is given to us, and then to experience the depths of the love of Christ as Jesus dies for us on the cross.

But today, we know the truth. Today, we can celebrate the fact that Jesus is our triumphant king and he, in fact, comes as our savior to rescue us, and he does it humbly, for he is indeed the one who comes in the name of the Lord.³ He is indeed the one promised in the line of David to reign forever and ever.⁴

I discovered something new this year. When you've been doing this for 30+ years, you don't really expect to find too much new, especially on the big Sundays and this is one of those big Sundays. I discovered that there are a few people that really don't believe that Palm Sunday ever happened. The reason they don't believe it is they say it could not have happened because there are no palm trees in Jerusalem. Well, it is true Jerusalem is at an elevation and really isn't considered much of a desert, but there are, in fact, palm trees there. They say, yeah, there are now, but there weren't then. So I got to thinking to myself, well gosh, what if they're right? What if there are no palms in Jerusalem? How might this still have happened? And then one of the commentaries said the palms likely came from Jericho. Jericho is like a hard, hard day's walk from Jerusalem. People did travel from Jericho to Jerusalem, but it's like, I don't know, 3500 feet of elevation. It's a long way up. It's a hard walk, and there are bandits, it's nasty, and it's hot, and when people get to Jerusalem, they're exhausted.

So what if there are no palms in Jerusalem? Do you know what that means? It means people knew that Jesus was going to be in Jerusalem for the Passover. They cut palms in Jericho, so that they can bring them all the way on that hard journey to Jerusalem because they were going to celebrate the coming of their Messiah and their savior. It means this was no

³ Matthew 23: 39b

⁴ Psalms 118:26

spontaneous act. It was planned. They had every intention of celebrating Jesus as Messiah. How do we know that? Well, in part, we know because it came out of that story, that Jesus rescued, that Jesus was the hero of the Lazarus story, that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. The scripture tells us that word was flowing through Jerusalem. But it didn't happen in Jerusalem and so they truly did believe that Jesus was the savior, the rescuer, the hero and they were ready to celebrate.

Now some of you might have been here last year. We were outside and I used an illustration last year that I got my mic cut off. You remember. So I decided to try to grab a different banner this year to make sure that nobody cut my mic off while we're inside. Then I decided that, you know, Sam might be here. Sam's a good friend of mine and Sam's big big on the Warriors. So I decided I'd go both baseball and basketball. I mean how many of you can relate to the idea of the ecstasy of being a fanatic? [Hands raised.] All right, good good. These were fans of Jesus. I mean this was almost like the Red Sox. I mean you know they have been waiting for a long time for a chance to win the pennant. They had been waiting for a long time for the Messiah to come. But they thought the Messiah was just coming to raise up a new nation, to throw off the Romans, which you know is a pretty big deal. I mean having a war and taking over a nation is not small potatoes, but the truth of the matter is Jesus wasn't just concerned about Rome. He was concerned about our hearts. He was concerned about our distance from God and everything that would separate us from God.

In our confession that we used on Ash Wednesday and that we've been using on Wednesday nights, we're reminded that sometimes we enter into the disciplines of Lent or other disciplines of our Christian walk to put ourselves in a position to more fully hear from God in our lives. One of the reasons that's important is that God doesn't just ask us to do the things that are fun and that we like to do. He often will ask us to do that which is best for us. Sometimes we don't feel like it. And I got news for you. I don't think Jesus felt like going to the cross. I don't think Jesus felt like being rejected by the very people that were shouting his praise and honor. But he was going to do what we needed him to do, so that we could be restored to the God who created us, to the God who loves us, to the God who makes us in his own image and brings his healing and hope into our lives.

It's quoted. "Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word."⁵ I was trying to figure out what that meant and then I found out that the Old Testament always describes resurrection as an apocalyptic, the end of human history. Raising the dead meant the end was here, that Jesus coming, that Jesus' power over death was the end of an era. Yeah, it was maybe the beginning of the "It is finished." That he would do what he needed to do to end the era of sin and bring in much more fully the era of grace and new life. That the power of God was being demonstrated. That the kingdom of God was at hand. That the reign of God was coming. And we want to hear and know this very day that the reign of God indeed has come into our hearts and lives. That as we receive Jesus as Savior, we receive him also as Lord. That as we tune our hearts to the Holy Spirit, it will show us where to go and how to grow as we know the Father. It's the journey of our Christian life, to walk in this time, when the kingdom of God is here among us. So Jesus, when he raised Lazarus from the dead, began this journey of exposing that he indeed is the

⁵ John 12: 17

Messiah and that is what brought him all the attention, the attention that finally resulted in his going to the cross.

Then we're reminded in Philippians exactly what is happening. It says this. "but [Jesus] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on the cross!"⁶ What an amazing choice - this love of God for us brought. They were ready to make him king. They were ready to give him the golden crown. It could have just been an ongoing celebration, as he called down the angel army from heaven to overthrow the Romans. But God cares too much about me and you to let that happen. This is a celebration of the coronation of the true king of kings, who chooses to be a servant and give his life for us. Everything in this world says choose the crown of gold and Jesus chooses the crown of thorns, that he might suffer and die for us and for our forgiveness. As we move into this Holy Week, as we bring a close to this Lenten season, know that Jesus gave his life for your forgiveness, for your renewal. It is indeed our hope because Christ is our humble and glorious king. Amen

⁶ Philippians 2:7-8