

Palm Sunday

April 5, 2020

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church and School Arlington, MN

Jesus willingly and humbly rides into Jerusalem to suffer and die for us.

OLD TESTAMENT: Zechariah 9:9-10 *Palm Sunday was no accident. God prophesied his Savior-King would come in lowliness.*

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

EPISTLE READING: Philippians 2:5-11 *How far did Jesus go to be our Savior-King? Listen.*

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but 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 a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

GOSPEL: Matthew 21:1-11 *As Jesus is hailed when he enters Jerusalem, remember how our Savior-King triumphs: by riding to his death on the cross.*

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest!” When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

SERMON: Matthew 21:1-11

JESUS IS JUST THE KING WE NEED

Many believe you can learn something about a person by the car they drive. Farmers and construction workers tend to drive trucks because they need to haul things or drive over muddy roads; soccer moms use to drive vans but now are seen in crossovers. Sam Walton, the late founder of Walmart, drove around in an old, rusty pick up. When asked why, he said he couldn't haul his dogs around in a Mercedes Benz. What does your car say about you?

I. Jesus may not be what we expected.

Let's say that Palm Sunday happened in the 21st century. What kind of car would Jesus have driven into Jerusalem? Would it have been a taxi or a rusty 1991 Impala because he had no money? Would he have ridden in a limousine like some celebrity? Or how about a presidential motorcade with SUVs and bulletproof windows and Secret Service disciples surrounding him? What would he have driven? Well, he would have entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey.

Yes even in the 21st century Jesus would have ridden on the back of a donkey because God said in Zechariah it would happen that way, and if God says it, it will happen. But why a donkey? Zechariah tells us why. It shows that the Messiah is ***"gentle and riding on a donkey."***

Sure, they poured into the streets for him. They hailed him as a new king, but it didn't take long for them to realize that Jesus was not the king they were expecting. They expected Jesus to be fierce, mighty, earthly ruler like Caesar or Napoleon or Patton. It is true. Jesus is pictured that way in the Bible. Look up Revelation 19, ***"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords."***

Now that's more like it. Imagine what this kind of Savior would do to the Romans. Imagine what this kind of Savior would do in the world today. Isn't that a Savior we all want? Don't like what is going on in the world? Let Jesus ride over them with his sharp sword, white horse, and blood stained robe. That's what the people wanted from Jesus. They wanted his robe soaked in Roman blood and his sword piercing Roman shields.

But that's not what they got. Sure it started out well. Jesus went into the temple and forcefully drove the moneylenders out. But over the week they listened to him and more and more they were disappointed. He was too gentle. When asked about taxes, Jesus didn't go on a rant about how high his taxes were. He told the people to pay their taxes to the Romans! Sure Jesus had performed many miracles but he didn't solve everyone's problems. Jesus just wasn't the king they wanted. So five days later many of them were more than willing to get rid of him. Maybe some of them chanted, "Crucify him."

How about you, what do you expect from God? We'd love to see miraculous things. We want every prayer answered exactly as we requested. What if God said no to a prayer? What if he doesn't take away all of your problems? Would you be disappointed? At times he does not appear to be the king we want. But he is the King we need.

II Jesus is the King we need.

Let's just say you are not doing well at work. You have been late five times in the last two weeks. You missed your quota twice. Suddenly your supervisor taps you on the shoulder and tells you the boss wants to see you right away. As you walk to his office, what do you expect? You expect the boss to chew you out. He may even fire you. You sit down in his office and he does discuss your past record. You offer excuses like busy traffic in the morning, but he asks why you didn't leave earlier. You run out of excuses and you know you deserve the worse. But to your amazement, he says, "I am not going to fire you. In fact, I am going to promote you." That is certainly not what you would expect.

Earlier we read a description of Jesus riding on a white horse with a robe stained in blood and a sharp sword. That is an accurate picture of Jesus as he will appear on Judgment Day, and those who opposed him will feel the fury of God's wrath. Sure, we'd love to see Jesus like that now, trampling down our enemies. But if Jesus came like that, wouldn't it be our blood on his sword? Wouldn't we be the ones he is trampling down? You may have noticed that on Communion Sundays, we put a little blurb in the bulletin suggesting how you may prepare for communion by reading page 156 of the hymnal. I really like

it. It asks in question two, *“What should I do if I am not aware of my sins or am not troubled by them?”* Then it gives this answer: *“I should examine myself according to the Ten Commandments and ask how well I have carried out my responsibilities as a husband or wife or single person, as a parent or child, an employer or employee, a teacher or student. Have I loved God with all my heart, gladly heard his Word, and patiently endured affliction? Have I been disobedient, proud, or unforgiving? Have I been selfish, lazy, envious, or quarrelsome? Have I lied or deceived, taken something not mine, or given anyone a bad name? Have I abused my body or permitted indecent thoughts to linger in my mind? Have I failed to do what is right and good?”*

Imagine if God calls us into his office and asked us those very questions. We would expect God to be angry over our sins, and he is. Yet, what do we get? Psalm 130 tells us, ***“If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.”*** Jesus will return on the last day as dispenser of God’s justice, but before then, right now, he comes to us gentle and riding on a donkey. He comes to offer us forgiveness and to wipe clean the record of our sins. On the cross they challenged him to use his power and come off that cross. That would be amazing. But Jesus stayed there because it is his death on the cross that will do us the most good. Your king conquered and destroyed our enemies, not with a mighty sword but with his own death and resurrection. He obliterates the guilt of our sin by becoming sin for us and by paying for it with his own life. Jesus did display his power, but not in a way we expected. He did it by rising from the dead.

What do you want from God? What do you expect? You may not know it, but every day of your life you are asked those questions. What is your answer? Do you want a Savior who will make life on earth as pleasant and comfortable as possible, and that’s it? If so, our prayers will reflect that. Of course, God promises he will provide for us one way or another. He gives seedtime and harvest, the ability to work, our life. But is that all we want from him? I am always struck by the reaction of the 5,000. Jesus fed them miraculously with a lunch. They followed him into the next day and gathered around Jesus again. Jesus didn’t say the words, but he gave them a choice between a Savior they wanted and a Savior they needed. He said he was not going to give them another free lunch. It is time now to start talking about something more important, where you will spend eternity. He told them they need him as the Bread of Life who will give them eternal life, not on earth, but in heaven. What kind of Savior did they want? Not that kind of a Savior. They all left.

God parted the Red Sea, made the sun stand still, healed countless lepers and raised the dead. Pray to God to deliver us once again. But when you pray, ask God for a child like faith. Trust him even when he does things we don’t expect. I heard of a gentleman who is over a hundred years old. He got the Spanish Flu and survived. He made it through the Great Depression. He fought in World War II and lived. Then he came down with Coronavirus and is recovering now. This pandemic will end, but what is next? This is why Jesus is the Savior we need. No doubt we can easily love this world so much we don’t want to leave it, not even for heaven. So hardships teach us that this world isn’t all that great. Hardship teaches us we need God more than we thought. Hardship gets us thinking about a better place, an open door into his heaven past the cross and through the open tomb.

Jesus does both. He takes care of us now, but he came to save us forever. This is the Savior we need. This is the Savior we want. Amen.