
THE WAY OF THE KINGDOM
Sermon for Psalm Sunday, 2018
Hebrews 12:1-6

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Hebrews 12:1-6: ¹ **Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a large cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every impediment, and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with patient endurance the race that has been set before us!** ² **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith! For the sake of the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** ³ **For consider Him who has endured such opposition against Himself from sinful men, so that you may not become weary or discouraged in your souls!** ⁴ **In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.** ⁵ **You have also forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not regard lightly the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you!”** ⁶ **For the Lord disciplines the one whom He loves, and He whips every son whom He receives.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“Rejoice greatly... Shout in triumph... Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious,” (Zech. 9:9). Here, hidden in the words of Zechariah, is a prophecy of Jesus coming into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as King. Imagine the shouting and rejoicing that is going to take place when the Lord comes for His people! The people will rise up and shout themselves hoarse in exploding enthusiasm. God has come just as He said He would! We see the fulfillment of this in our Gospel for today when Jesus entered Jerusalem amid praise and glory.¹

“Your King is coming to you.” We too are going to see Him. Just like Job we are going to see: ²⁵ *I myself know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last He will stand on the dust.* ²⁶ *After this, my skin will surround this body, and from my flesh*

¹ John 12:12-19

I shall see God.²⁷ I myself shall see Him for myself. My own eyes will see, and not as a stranger,” (Job 19:25-27).

Surely, when we hear and dwell on such words, we think of how Christ has won us for Himself, and that we have every intention on remaining faithful to Jesus and His Church. We would rather suffer all, even death itself, than to fall away from Him. Yet this is easier said than done, because when we remember how we have not always been as faithful as we should, when we think of life and its realities, and how many times we have fallen into sin, then we find that it is hard to remain faithful! Soon, questions and doubts come flooding into our minds. Has God truly forgiven me? Am I really one of His children? Maybe *I do need to do something to earn His favour?* And on it goes.

In our mid-week Lenten services this past six weeks, our sermons have been based on passages from the Book of Hebrews, where we have heard that Jesus is our great High Priest. Today, our text is also taken from Hebrews, but here we find the inspired writer teaching us that even though we are destined for heaven, yet life is a struggle. Jesus has indeed made the acceptable sacrifice of Himself on our behalf to God, and God has fully accepted that sacrifice, yet that does not mean our lives will be a life of ease. With **patient endurance** we run **the race that has been set before us!**

Jesus once told His disciples and all those who would be His followers: *“If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross every day, and follow Me!”* (Luke 9:23). These words describe the chief pattern of the way of the kingdom, outlining it as the way of the cross. The writer of Hebrews says much the same thing, and quite explicitly. He says, **“For the Lord disciplines the one whom He loves, and He whips every son whom He receives.**

Jesus has never assured us that being His children would guarantee a life of perfect ease, a life free from trouble, pain, and sorrow. The Hebrew Christians, to whom this Letter was first addressed, had been deeply shaken by the persecutions suffered by their fellow Christians. They were wondering whether Christianity was really worthwhile. In fact, they were debating whether they should give up this “way of the kingdom.” The holy writer therefore pleads with them, giving them a clear understanding and interpretation of the “kingdom way,” which is so often the way of the cross and of great tribulation.

Today, many church members, seeing the world full of tribulation, perhaps even bearing a heavy burden of sorrow and grief in their own lives, are filled with the same doubts. The sense of guilt and uncertainty that is within us because of our sinful nature causes us to wonder about suffering, and actually makes us think that perhaps Christianity and faithful church membership does not pay and is not pleasing to God. We might even feel that God is angry and unhappy with us, that He is “getting even” with us!

How necessary it is, therefore, for each of us, especially for our young members, to know *beforehand* what Christianity and church membership is really all about. “Forewarned is forearmed!” Proper interpretations and explanations of disturbing problems, made before they arise, make for confident acceptance and successful solution of these problems. Quite often we find ourselves in difficult places because we have not taken the time to hear what God has to say on a certain topic. This is because we are not interested, or because we have grown cold and forgotten what He has said.

The way of the kingdom also means no crown without the cross.

This was demonstrated by all of the great men of God who through trial and tribulation have now entered into the kingdom of heaven. The author of Hebrews lists many of them from days of old. In the chapter preceding our text we read these words at the end of the listing of such great men as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, ³⁶ *Others experienced mocking and whippings and also chains and imprisonment.* ³⁷ *They were stoned, they were tempted, they were sawn in two, and they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins. They were destitute, oppressed, and tormented.* ³⁸ *The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground,”* (Heb.11:36-38). Our text today refers to these as **a large cloud of witnesses**. These are the martyrs and the great saints of the church. They were acquainted with sorrow and grief because of their membership in the kingdom. Why should we be surprised at our little sorrows? Furthermore, the greatest of all examples illustrating the way of the kingdom is that of the King Himself, Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, who on this first day of Holy Week all those years ago resolutely went up to Jerusalem that “*all the things that have been written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled,*” (Luke 18:31).

Our text refers to Him and His suffering in this way: **For the sake of the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame, and has**

sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ **For consider Him who has endured such opposition against Himself from sinful men, so that you may not become weary or discouraged in your souls!**

The Lord Jesus sacrificed Himself, allowing the greatest shame and torture to be inflicted upon His body and soul, so that we would have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, that we would be members of the kingdom of God. Are we to look for *anything less* as members of the kingdom walking the kingdom way? Are we greater than our Lord? Should we not say with the Apostle Paul: *“Therefore, I shall boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses?”* (2 Cor.12:9.) May the crosses that rest upon us then, be accepted as the way that leads to the King, that draws us nearer to God.

However, a timid soul may say: *“This is so hard, how can I ever bear it? How can I walk the way of the Kingdom?”* Be comforted, for the way of the kingdom is also the way of faith.

Returning once more to the catalogue of the great sufferers of the kingdom set forth in Hebrews chapter 11, to whom our text refers when it says, **we are surrounded by such a large cloud of witnesses**, we note that all of these heroes were men and women *of faith*. It was their faith that helped them to triumph and to gain the victory. It does not matter to which one you turn - Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, the martyrs of the cross - they all had faith in the Lord. It is stated, ³³ *They through faith conquered kingdoms, they enforced justice, they obtained promises, they shut the mouths of lions,* ³⁴ *they quenched fierce fire, they escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness they were made strong, they became powerful in battle, they turned foreign armies to flight.* ³⁵ *Women received their dead raised to life again. Other people were tortured. They did not accept deliverance, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection,”* (Heb. 11:33-35.) They suffered - they conquered - through faith! Even so today those who walk the kingdom way conquer all obstacles and overcome all sorrows of the way by faith.

It is simple faith in Jesus to whom we turn in humble dependence. Our text describes it in this way, ² **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith!**

Jesus is not only the object of faith, but also the very One who makes faith possible. Faith is trust in the promises of God. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's

promise. He has given Himself that through His blood we would have forgiveness of all our sins. By His life of obedience and by His substitutionary death, Jesus has earned life and salvation for us. He is therefore the “**Author.**” By His Holy Spirit, whom He poured upon the Church, and who is now operative in Word and Sacrament, Jesus is the “**Perfecter.**” He lovingly calls us to Himself and says: “*Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden; and I shall give you rest!*” (Matt. 11:28).

As we, then, look to Jesus and come to Him humbly, simply, just as we are, He gives us the strength that overcomes all sorrows and wins all victories. It is this faith that moves us to say, as we walk the kingdom way: “*I can do everything through Him who strengthens me,*” (Phil. 4:13). Through the peace of forgiveness, by the removal of all fear and guilt, we have the power to walk by faith the Kingdom way.

There is no need to hesitate. As we struggle through this life, we look to Jesus, but we look also beyond to the goal that Jesus has in store for us - the kingdom of heaven. Remember that Jesus received courage and strength in His hours of darkness by setting His eyes upon the end, the purpose, and the goal of all that He was suffering: the salvation of mankind. Our text puts it in these words: **For the sake of the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** Jesus always knew that His sorrows and sufferings were to this end, that He would redeem men from sin, gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven for them, and that when His task was finished, He would sit down again in the throne of glory to live and to reign, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, forever. The blessed glory of this aim was like a magnet that drew Him out of the darkness of the pit of hell onward and upward through the way of sorrows unto the victory. **He endured the cross, despising its shame.** The price that He had to pay, though indescribably great, was yet not too great for the value received by lost and condemned mankind.

Dear friends, in sorrow as well as in joy, we need always to set our sights on the goal of glory. The distant glimmering rays of Jerusalem the Golden, the Holy City of God, should never be clouded from our eyes by any of the little confusing goals and aims of this present world or by the little crosses, griefs, and pains we may have to bear.

When the faithful Israelites of old went to their Zion in Jerusalem, they were encouraged and strengthened in their wearisome journey by the happy prospect

that soon they would be within the gates of Jerusalem and would kneel in the holy temple of God. The thought of the joy and the glory that awaits us likewise encourages every pilgrim of the kingdom way to take new courage and strength and to walk bravely and resolutely onward. Looking unto Jesus, who is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God, hear Him say: *“I shall give to the one who wins the victory the privilege of sitting with Me on My throne, just as I have won the victory and have sat down with my Father on His throne,”* (Rev. 3:21).

Such unbelievably wonderful prospects will give strength to our fainting hearts and inspire our zeal. It will quicken our pace along the kingdom way and cause us to lift our heads with courageous erectness.

So it is. The Hebrew Christians understood, and they were strengthened. They were now prepared for everything that was to come to them, the sorrows and the persecutions. Theirs had been only little troubles, they had not yet endured bitter persecution, as the text states: **In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.** However, soon that shadow was to fall on them. Nevertheless, we can be sure that when they had received this wonderful instruction of our text, they were encouraged, and they no longer fainted and trembled at the prospect of traveling the way of the cross. We feel confident that they walked courageously and triumphantly through the very gate of glory.

It is reasonable to suppose that many of those who first heard this Letter read to them were called upon to bring the sacrifice of martyrdom, and of this we can also be sure - they trembled not upon the brink, but in the tradition of the way of all the heroes of faith in ages past, they overcame and won the victory through the same faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The appeal of our writer who says, **let us also lay aside every impediment, and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with patient endurance the race that has been set before us**, even the sin of fear and impatience - did not fall upon deaf ears and untouched hearts. It bore fruit, the fruit of the glorious victory, the fruit of sainthood in the eternal kingdom.

Let us, removing all fear and faintheartedness, also **run with patient endurance the race that has been set before us.** We are members of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. May we look to Him who is **the Author and Perfecter of our faith** and saying with the Apostle Paul as we look to the glorious goal: *“¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time do not deserve to be compared with the glory that is about to be revealed to us,”* confidently walk onward and

upward. May we never waver or turn aside, but remain faithful to Him, as He is faithful to us. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT (PALM SUNDAY)

Heavenly Father, we come into Your presence with thanksgiving and joy. You are a great God. You rule over the whole earth from the deepest seas to the highest hills. We bow down and worship You, for You are our Maker. We are the people You care for, and the flock for which You provide.

We thank and praise You especially that You have sent to us the living Word, Jesus Christ, Your Son. We praise You that He willingly accepted the disgrace of dying on the cross for us. Grant that we may keep our eyes fixed on Him, and may not grow weary in doing good, become discouraged, or murmur when we are chastened and corrected. Uplift us with the assurance that, as we share in Jesus' sufferings, so we shall also share in His resurrection to eternal life.

Save us, then, O Lord, not by any good deeds that we have done, but by Your mercy, through the new birth given in our baptism and the new life created by the Holy Spirit. Rescue us from all sin, and purify us to serve and praise You.

Put Your will into our minds, and write it into our hearts. Put Your song into our spirits, that we may proclaim with joy: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Give us the power to seek out those who are still strangers to Your salvation. Send workers to preach Your Word in truth, and to proclaim the name of Jesus as the only name under heaven through which people can be saved. Prosper the witness of all Your children throughout the world, that all may know You.

Give to this congregation, and to all who worship here, joy and energy as we serve You. Give us all willing minds and pure hearts that we may do our utmost to build and strengthen Your kingdom.

We pray for all who are burdened by sickness, sorrow, pain, anxiety, and fear of death. Be with them as they pass through troubled waters. Give them the faith that knows that You will deliver them in Your wisdom and love.

Lord, You are able to keep us from falling and to bring us faultless and joyful before Your glorious presence. To You, the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, in all ages past, and now, and for ever and ever! Amen.

PALM SUNDAY

Zechariah 9:9-12

⁹ Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious. He is humble and is riding on a donkey, yes, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰ "I shall cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The bow of battle will be eliminated." He will proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹ "As for you also, because of the blood of your Covenant, I shall release your prisoners from the waterless cistern."

¹² "Return to your fortress, prisoners who have hope! Even today I declare that I shall restore twice as much to you.

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Have the same attitude as Christ Jesus had! ⁶ Although He was in the form of God, yet He did not consider His equality with God as a prize to exploit. ⁷ Instead, He emptied Himself, took on the form of a slave and became like other human beings; and, when He was found in the appearance of a human being, ⁸ He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ That is why God also has very highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every other name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven and on earth and under the earth may kneel, ¹¹ and that

everyone may confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

John 12:12-19

¹² On the next day, the large crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took branches of palm-trees, went out to meet Him and began to shout, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!" and "the King of Israel!"

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as Scripture has said: ¹⁵ "Stop being afraid, daughter of Zion! Look! Your King is coming, sitting on the colt of a donkey."

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but, when Jesus had been glorified, they remembered that these things had been written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

¹⁷ Therefore, the crowd that had been with Him when He had called Lazarus out of the tomb and had raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸ This was also a reason why the crowd went to meet Him, that they heard that He had performed this miraculous sign. ¹⁹ Therefore, the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are not achieving anything. Look! The world has gone after Him."