

JESUS RODE INTO JERUSALEM IN ORDER TO RECONCILE GOD'S LOVE AND JUSTICE**Sermon for Palm Sunday, 2021****John 12:12-19**

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 our Gospel read before, 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."**

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

Dear friends in Christ,

In a world that has quickly advanced to take full advantage of online platforms, fake news is something to be aware of. I am sure you all know what I mean. Often, news is reported that doesn't tell the whole story. Often it is skewed one way or the other. That is why you cannot listen to everything you hear, or believe everything you read. Sometimes someone will say something, and the news report will take the words completely out of context. We see that all the time. So getting the context right is always important. Many unfortunate events have been the result of things taken out of context.

The context of Palm Sunday is that Jesus' had set His face toward Jerusalem,¹ where He had an appointment with a cross. He had come from Galilee preaching and teaching and healing as He went, but ultimately, Jerusalem was the goal of His journey. On Palm Sunday, we remember that Jesus arrived at His goal and began to set into motion the final stages of the plan that would put Him on the cross for the sins of the world.

One of Jesus' last stops on the way to Jerusalem had been to the house of His good friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. When he arrived at their house, Lazarus had been dead for four days, but when He left, Lazarus was alive again. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead.² The news spread like wildfire.

As Jesus began the final leg of His trip from the home of His newly revived friend, the city of Jerusalem poured out onto the road to welcome Him. It was Passover, and people from all over the Jewish world had come to celebrate in Jerusalem. No doubt, many people were there from Galilee and had seen Jesus perform other miracles. For many of these people, the resurrection of Lazarus was the capstone of the career of this Miracle Worker who was now 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!"**

Do the words **"Hosanna!" "Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!"** sound familiar? They should. They are the words that we sing every time we prepare to partake of the Lord's Supper. In a way, we have our very own Palm Sunday every time we celebrate that holy meal. We too celebrate the coming of the Lord as He comes to give Himself to us in His body and blood.

Now, we know why Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. We have the advantage of the 20/20 hindsight of historical perspective. We have the written word of the Evangelists to tell us what was going on. Most of the people who were there that day did not know what was going on. Jesus had taught them that the definition of the Christ was to suffer, die, and rise from the dead on the third day. Still, until they actually witnessed these things, the people couldn't grasp His teaching.

¹ Luke 9:51

² John 11:1-44

There were probably dozens of opinions as to the reason Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. Some may have thought that Jesus was coming into town as a loyal Son of Israel in order to simply celebrate the Passover. Some of the more radical elements of society may have hoped that Jesus was coming to liberate Jerusalem from the tyranny of Rome. There may have been many who received the benefit of His touch - people who had once been lepers, lame, blind, deaf, demon-possessed, but were now healed and wanted to take another opportunity to thank and praise Jesus. Who knows all the different reasons why the people came out to celebrate the celebrity status of Jesus?

However, there are two things we can say with certainty. The Pharisees were very frustrated and said to one another, **“You see that you are not achieving anything. Look! The world has gone after Him.”** Using classic hyperbole, the Pharisees cursed their bad fortune. Every threat they had made, every question they had raised, and every accusation they had levelled hadn’t accomplished a thing. Jesus was, on that day, more popular than ever. How could they fight against that? The other thing we can say is that few if any people expected Jesus to come into Jerusalem in order to meet His death.

There is nothing unusual about death – people die. Every single one of us is travelling closer and closer to death as we make our way in this world. It’s been that way ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Now, death is a very real part of this world for all of us. The Apostle Paul reminds us, *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). It is a sign that we are sinners, and because we are sinners, we sin all the time. We daily sin much and deserve eternal punishment. Lying, cheating, stealing, unfaithfulness, and even murder are all basic parts of our everyday lives. Even when God tries to give us the gifts of His love, we reject them. Sooner or later, each of us must collect the payment for all this sin, and that payment is death. So why is it so important that Jesus is entering Jerusalem to die? We all have to die sometime.

It is important because Jesus’ death is going to do something that no other death could do. His death is going to reconcile God’s love and His justice. God is perfect and cannot allow sin to go unpunished. That is His justice. He also loves us and does not want to punish us. That is His love. To satisfy His justice and His love, God placed the sin of the world on Jesus. Then He punished the sin of the world in His beloved Son Jesus Christ.

In a way that we cannot understand, *God the Father forsook God the Son.*³ The Son endured the punishment of hell on the cross and satisfied God’s justice for all people. That means that all people have total access to the love and forgiveness of God the Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is the reason why Palm Sunday is so important for us. It commemorates the beginning of the week that ended with the death that reconciled God’s love and His justice. It commemorates the beginning of the week that ended with the death of Jesus.

Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to go to His death. His death would reconcile God’s justice and love and earn forgiveness for all people. However, if that is the case, why do some people still go to hell?

There is only one reason. They reject the love and forgiveness that Jesus had earned for them on the cross. They try to find love and forgiveness by living a better life, but no one can do that. They try to find that love and forgiveness in some other god, be it Allah, or Buddha, or Hare Krishna. Or maybe they try to find that love and forgiveness deep down in their own hearts. By trying to find that love and forgiveness in all those other places, they are telling Jesus that they don’t want His love and forgiveness and that they would rather spend eternity in hell than spend it with Him. The only unforgivable sin is the sin against the Holy Spirit.⁴ By the Law of God, the Spirit brings people to repentance, and by the Gospel, He brings them to faith in Christ. We call this conversion or regeneration. When people reject the Gospel, they resist the work of the Holy Spirit; thus, they sin against Him. That is why some people go to hell.

Jesus did not enter Jerusalem just to meet His death. Although Palm Sunday began the week that ended in His death, the next week started with His life. Although He once laid in death’s dark chains, He now lives. Jesus did not just enter Jerusalem to die, but to die and rise from the dead.

Christ’s resurrection means that His death successfully brought God’s justice and love into perfect harmony. His resurrection is the proclamation of Christ’s victory over sin, death, and the devil. He has opened heaven for all mankind. Only those who reject God’s love by rejecting Jesus will remain outside where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁵

³ Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34

⁴ Matthew 12:31

⁵ Luke 13:28

Jesus rode into Jerusalem to His death and resurrection some two thousand years ago on the other side of the world. Obviously, we weren't there. Nevertheless, God has provided ways for the reconciliation of God's love and justice to reach us here in this place and time. The Holy Spirit inspired some of the eyewitnesses to write it down in the Gospels. Jesus has given the sacrament of Holy Baptism to His church. He has given the Holy Spirit to His church so that she can forgive sins in His name. He has promised to be in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Holy Supper. In these ways, the Holy Spirit connects us to the work that Jesus had done for us during the eight days that began when He rode into Jerusalem.

When the crowds sang "**Hosanna!**" they did not realise their Messiah would soon die for the sins of the world. Through the Word of God, the waters of baptism, the proclamation of absolution, and the Holy Supper, we know exactly why we sing "**Hosanna!**"

When we sing "**Hosanna**" next time we prepare to dine with and on our Lord, let us remember that we are celebrating the Lord entering the New Jerusalem of His Church to give Himself to us in His body and blood. Praise God for the reconciliation of His love and justice in His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation! 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. We thank You hearing our prayers and sending us rain. However, we do ask that You would watch over and care for all those who have been affected by the recent floods, and give them strength and courage in their losses.

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

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