

March 28, 2021

Palm Sunday

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Milan, WI

St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Edgar, WI

Text: John 12:20-43

In the Name of the Father and the ✠ Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week, a week with two different emphases, two hearts if you will. We have a heart of sorrow but also a heart of joy. In fulfillment of the prophesy of Zechariah, Christ Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the public climax of His ministry. He rode into the city not on a horse like a warriors or king. He rode into town on a donkey, the humble mode of transport that most people used. They waved palm branches and threw down their cloaks in His path, shouting for joy at this famous miracle worker who had finally come to Jerusalem to do... something. They really had no idea, but it had to be something special, something big. The people of the Israel had a heart of joy for this miracle worker in part because they had heard much about Him. Some had witnessed His miracles and some had even been healed by Him. But the truth is most of them didn't know who He was, not really. For now they were on the bandwagon because they had heard the rumors spread through social media... that is, by talking... and they thought He was going to overthrow the government and hand out more free food. They saw Him as a political hero, not as the Son of God and Savior of mankind. Strange how people today still have trouble keeping those two job descriptions separate.

But the other side of Palm Sunday, the heart of sorrow, is for us Christians who know with perfect hindsight why Jesus was riding into the city so publically, why He didn't fear His impending arrest and torture. We feel sorrow because we were the cause of His suffering. It had to happen because of us and for us. That is why after the service today, we veil the crucifix and crosses in black and they remains veiled throughout the week. We mourn the suffering and death of God in the flesh, caused by our sinfulness.

We are told that there were Jewish authorities who believed in the Christ, members of the Sanhedrin and the Pharisee party. We are given the names of some of these men elsewhere, men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Men who understood that Jesus was more than just a celebrity miracle worker, that God was really with Him in a way they couldn't fully explain. But although they recognized Him as the promised Messiah, they could not, would not, compromise their own positions of comfort and safety for Him. As the Evangelist recorded, **“Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”** (v.42-43)

That last line sums up so much of American life. The never-ending political theater in our country rewards lies, hatred and greed, so that is where the politicians have gone. Covet your neighbor's wealth! Hate your neighbor's skin color! Destroy all who stand in your way! The cult of personality around many politicians has taken on a religious fervor, with each candidate being hailed as the savior of America and the destroyer of the things bad. The masses buy into this, because they have exchanged worship of the Living God for worship of the state. The government is the idol they bow down to, the thing they look to for every good. And along with this new religion, we have a new inquisition. We demonize anyone with a different skin color, who speaks a different language at home, who dares to think differently than we do. Our obligations to love our neighbor are thrown right out the window because it is convenient to do so. Love our enemies, as Christ taught us to do? Not a chance. Because it is easier to spread fear hatred than it is to spread mercy and understanding.

We are timid when it comes to speaking God's truth because the forces of political correctness might overhear us. So we find ourselves waffling on the sanctity of marriage, on the clear condemnation of homosexual behavior as sinful, on the abhorrent practice of murdering children in the womb for the sake of convenience. We would rather be called "enlightened" and "progressive" by the world, so we bury the truth we know in our hearts and cover it with lies. Like those authorities who believed in Jesus, conceal the truth with sealed lips. We shrug away the lie that sex equals love so whatever you want to do with your body is love, no matter the number or gender or age of the people involved. We sit silently and allow the world to redefine marriage, euthanasia and gender to fit the whim and fancy of the mob. Keep your head down and your mouth shut and maybe the world won't turn its hateful gaze on you. After all, you don't want to get labeled as one of those hateful, backward Christians.

Repent. Our Lord told His disciples, "**Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.**" (v.25-26) We are called to follow Christ, not the world, and that means we will be hated just as Christ was hated. Just as He is still hated. The world has always been under the power of Satan and it was he, the "**ruler of this world**" (v.31), that Christ came to defeat on the cross. What looked like weakness was actually His strength. Yes, the devil is still at work trying to spread his poison but his days are numbered, because Christ Jesus did not turn away from Golgotha. He did not give in to his own human fear and ask the Father to spare Him from that awful hour. As the obedient Son, as the Suffering Servant, He knew it was His Father's will that had to be done. That hour, foretold by the prophets. That hour, ordained by God's mercy since the Fall of Adam and Eve in the garden. That hour had come and Jesus went to it, riding humbly on a donkey, knowing the waving palms would soon turn into whips and the shouted praises would turn into curses.

We start Holy Week not with the somber attitude of a funeral, but with repentance for our weaknesses and expectation of the joy to come. We know we are no better than those fickle crowds who cheered Christ one day and spurned Him the next. But we also know that He was victorious over the prince of this world and so we are victorious through Him. No matter what the world or the devil throws at you, you cannot be snatched from His hand for you are sealed in your Baptism by His blood. All of your sins, even the sin of timid faith, has been forgiven because of Him. Let the world threaten and let the devil howl. We belong to Christ and so we rejoice in the glad “hosannas” to the King of Kings. His sacrifice is our redemption and His resurrection is our joy.

In Jesus’ holy and precious name, Amen.

Rev. Schopp