

REJOICE, PEOPLE OF GOD! OUR KING IS WITH US!

Zechariah 9:9-10

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

Palm Sunday Weekend, April 5, 2020

Palm Sunday 2020--a challenging day? Most years you would ALL be here and we would grab palm branches and walk them down the aisle. ***"All glory, laud and honor to You, Redeemer King. To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring! You are the King of Israel and David's royal son, now in the LORD's name coming, the King and Blessed One."***

Most years Palm Sunday is thought-provoking. A Sunday of celebration and rejoicing over our King with images of his glorious ride into Jerusalem, but there is reality in the background—prophecies of old. Our King coming into his suffering. The battle is about to be engaged. Intense darkness before the dawning of the new day!

But is this Palm Sunday especially challenging since we can almost SEE the darkness? COVID-19 rules our lives. Death tolls and infection rates. "Safer At Home" is getting old; but we know we ARE safer at home. In the midst of it all, what do we hear from God today? ***"Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Your King comes to you!"*** But is it possible that our hearts are struggling because of what our eyes are seeing? Is it possible our hearts are struggling because of what are ears are hearing? People dying alone. An unseen enemy that is cruel in its grip! "Rejoice greatly, people of God? Our King is here?"

1. Do You See His Victory?

A. He Is the Son of God

The Jews of Jerusalem were in "fickle love" with Jesus of Nazareth. Crowds LOVE a champion as king who is handsome, with some history, and with some OBVIOUS human strength! Jesus seemed to fit that bill short of the handsome (Isaiah 53).

For three years Jesus had "wowed" the crowds with his "magic tricks"—MIRACLES to those who saw the hand of God; "tricks" for those with attitude, "I wonder what he can do for me next?!" He was a charismatic speaker. An army of folks were ready to follow! "Where will you take us, Jesus of Nazareth? To Rome and back in the glory of our father, David?"

But, when it comes to Jesus' purpose, he is NOT a "son of men"; he is the Son of God! His miracles were to display his Father's love for his people. His preaching revealed God's strength for his people! Jesus came to address our greatest need—our sin that is killing us and our selfishness that threatens every relationship. HIS glory on Palm Sunday was in his RIGHTeousness, his holiness before his Father. He was riding in humbly to DO his Father's will. His focus? The cross of Calvary.

B. He Packs a Punch

Palm Sunday is a challenging day—sin's reality in the midst of all the glory! Don't let your heart fool you. Jesus didn't. He was laser-focused!

Oh, Satan had tried to distract him over 33 years of living and 3 years of preaching and teaching. Temptations of earthly glory instead of the cross. Temptations of earthly pleasure instead of

heaven's eternal joys. Temptations to use his power to fix the symptoms of sin without addressing its cure.

And then Palm Sunday morning. The adulation of the crowd! ***“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord!”*** Hailing him as a king! Rome failing to react! GLORY!!!

Did Jesus ride in with a smile? Was there joy in his heart over the approval rating of the crowd that would swing 180 degrees in five, short days? What does “bittersweet” look like on the face of the Son of God who was packing a punch of a far different nature that no one in the crowd seemed to see?

Jesus did NOT let his heart or his eyes fool him. HE saw his victory—what it needed to be.

APPLICATION Are WE laser-focused in our time of trouble? Tuned in to God's agenda as the surge is on its way? This world with its pleasures and treasures is passing away. Sin's curse and the self-centeredness of mankind is heading toward its final resolution in the judgment hall of the Almighty King. This human existence is not sustainable, nor would we want it to be. Yet in this moment of darkness, Satan wants to fool our hearts into believing that evil is winning the day and that our King does not give us true hope! Let not our hearts be fooled.

Some in the church have been preaching for a long time a “prosperity gospel”, the idea that it is God's will for his children to have and to claim earthly health and wealth and prosperity. “Just believe and the virus cannot touch you.” Is that what Jesus teaches? ***“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace.”***

In five short days, Jesus would tell Pilate, ***“My kingdom, my rule, is NOT something of this world.”*** Laser-focused...our King! Palm Sunday? A thought-provoking day!

2. We Will Know His Peace

A. His Weapons Are Not of This World

But wait, what IS this peace in Jesus? Do you see it? Truth be told, our King has it with him on his Palm Sunday ride. It's in his scabbard—the sheath for his sword! “Now we're talkin'! Weapons for war! Coronavirus look out! Victory is about to become OBVIOUS!”

Except, elsewhere our King reminds us that ***“though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.”*** The King reveals that the sword in his scabbard is the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Jesus had come to wield that sword—to preach its message that cuts to the heart especially as he fulfills its promise to its end at the cross! But of course there is more to that story, it's called Easter! But back to Palm Sunday.

Do you think that ANYONE watching his ride down the Mt. of Olives, up the Kidron Valley, to the East Gate of the city SAW the gleam of his sword in the sunlight—the Sword of the Spirit? Do you think Mary and Martha were saw and remembered his words? ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”?***

We miss the gleam of his sword, too, if coronavirus is our focus. Coronavirus? Too small a thing in itself for this King! Life after death and life through his death was his prize for you and me! Peace, that is out of this world!

B. His Victory Is the One That Matters

You see, HIS version of victory is the one that matters.

When Jesus rose from the dead, there were no human witnesses in the cool of the tomb. No crowds of people. Probably angels and the accolades of the One who had sent him. ***“I sent my Son as an atoning sacrifice for their sins (1 John 4:10). I delivered him over to death for their sins and raised him to life for their justification (Romans 4:25).”*** God the Father saw the victory, clapped his hands—sin, death, hell defeated! ***“Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna to my Son, their King!”***

As Jesus was poised at the top of the Mt. of Olives, ready to descend into the valley of the shadow of his death, WHERE was his focus? The crowds below? The cross on Calvary on a hill NOT so far away? The empty tomb? **YES, to all three! He had come to do his Father’s will.** The Sword of the Spirit was gleaming in its scabbard! ***“Father, your children will see it in the end. So, let us ride! Let us ride on to Majesty—majesty of YOUR making!”***

APPLICATION You and I will always come to our God in our earthly need and he will hear our cries. And there IS no time like the present! But, we will NOT be surprised when he first addresses our greatest need. To the one who could not walk, he spoke forgiveness first. To the one who could not see, he revealed himself as the Light of the World. To those dying he says, ***“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened. I will give you rest.”*** Friends, do we see our King?

CONCLUSION Martin Luther had a Palm Sunday faith. He saw his King in midst of the darkness! Listen to his words written to a friend as they dealt with the bubonic plague, the Black Death, that eventually killed 25 million people in Europe alone!

“I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me...and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash no foolhardy and does not tempt God."

A Palm Sunday faith? It is practical to the end! For even in the darkness it sees our King sitting up on that donkey! He will ride with us in the darkness to a glory and a peace that is out of this world! Hosanna to the Son of David! Amen.

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