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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion (Series A)

April 9, 2017

Text: John 12:12–19; Matthew 27:11–66

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It began with such joy and celebration! “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” So shouted the crowd on that first Palm Sunday so long ago. The Jewish pilgrims knew something extraordinary was happening. Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, the one who raised Lazarus from the dead was there in the vicinity of Jerusalem for the Passover. When had the dead being raised to life after 4 days?! (John 11) Never! Who has ever heard of anyone healing a man born blind (John 9). Not in Israel had such miracles been seen! That miracle-working Jesus is nearby.

Then word began to spread among the large crowd of Jewish pilgrims. Jesus is coming. An impromptu parade formed. The Passover pilgrims gathered palm branches to wave in celebration as the prophet entered the Holy City. And wouldn't you know it, he was riding on “a young donkey” as prophesied by Zechariah so many centuries earlier. “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!” Is it possible? Can Jesus, the miracle-working prophet from Nazareth also be the long-awaited King? “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”

Yes, dear saints of God, Jesus is the promised King of Israel, the King come to save His people from more than political and cultural oppression. He came to Jerusalem to destroy forever the power of sin; to vanquish Satan and His evil host; to remove the sting of death and hell, and to open wide His Father's heavenly kingdom for all people who look to Him in faith.

The crowd got it right. Jesus is the blessed One who comes in the name of Israel. King Jesus did enter Jerusalem in fulfillment of Holy Scripture for the time of His coronation had come. Thank you children for helping us rejoice today. Your procession is a timely reminder that King Jesus not only came to Jerusalem long, long ago, but He continues to come among us today by the power of the Holy Spirit in read

and preached Word and life giving Sacrament. “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes (to us) in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”

The joy and excitement of King Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem gave way to cruel and bitter mocking by the end of the week. Our Lord’s disciples couldn’t have known or anticipated what would happen the rest of the week. Monday through Wednesday, our Lord taught vigorously in the Temple using parables. Jesus engaged the Sadducees, the Herodians, the Scribes and Pharisees, in intensive debate. Our Lord pronounced woes upon those false teachers. He lamented the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Jesus taught about the end times and the signs leading up to that great, Last Day. Watch, pray, and be ready, says Jesus, for that Day will come suddenly. Then all the nations of the earth will be ushered before the Son of God in glorious splendor to be judged; the righteous shall enter into the Father’s kingdom, the unrighteous into the fires of hell prepared for the devil and his angels.

That’s when the intrigue begins. Matthew writes, “When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, ‘You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.’ Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him” (26:1–4). The Palm Sunday crowd may have rejoiced in the coming of their so-called King. But not Caiaphas and the majority of the Jewish leadership. Their rejection of King Jesus is absolute and complete.

Jesus celebrated the Passover on Thursday evening with His disciples. He bequeathed to His Church until the end of time His Supper, the Lord’s Supper. His holy, precious body and blood are now given under bread and wine for us Christians to eat and to drink. This is a kingly gift given to His royal subjects. These words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins...are “the main thing” in this royal banquet. Whoever believes these words has exactly what Jesus promises, “forgiveness of sins.”

After celebrating the Lord’s Supper, Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane. His agony and bitter passion begin in earnest. Great drops of blood begin to swell forth from the pores in His skin. Such was the misery and turmoil. Nevertheless, not My will. But thine Be done, dear Father in heaven.

Judas, one of the Lord’s close disciples, betrays His King with a kiss. After a mock trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin and rough treatment from Jewish guards, our Lord

appears before the Roman governor, Pontus Pilate. “Are you the King of the Jews?” asks Pilate. Jesus answers, “You have said so.” Curious isn’t it? Holy Week began with Jesus acclaimed the King of the Jews come in the name of the Lord. Now, He’s asked about His kingship again. The chief priests and elders use it against Jesus when they give testimony. He’s an insurrectionist, Pilate! Deal with Him. Crucify Him like you Romans know how to do. In an fascinating twist of irony, Scripture records that Pilate knows Jesus is innocent but condemns Him anyway as the King of the Jews!

The Palm Sunday crowd got it right. Pilate got it right too. Jesus is the King of the Jews. He will suffer as the King of the Jews at the hands of the Roman battalion for they “put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews’” (vs. 28–29). After they had their sinister fun, the battalion led Jesus to Golgotha and there they crucified the King of Jews as the inscription on the cross makes clear for all to see.

The chief priests, scribes, and elders continue to mock this suffering King. “He (Jesus) saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him” (vs. 41–42). It was true. Jesus did save others. Lazarus, the man born blind, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well; all the people we have considered over the past few weeks in our worship services. But He could not save Himself. Oh, Jesus said He could call forth 12 legions of angels to rescue Him. But He couldn’t do that and be the King of the Jews.

Dear saints of God *and especially you two confirmands*, know this for certain. Your King, your Savior, could not save Himself because He desires to save you from the illegitimate power of sin, Satan, and death. He will not and cannot abandon you; His love is too great. King Jesus dies saving the world shouting words from Psalm 22, spoken by King David of Israel, some 1,000 year earlier. “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”

This Palm Sunday sets the theme for the rest of this week; yea, for the rest of time on this side of eternity. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary is your Lordly King, “who has redeemed you, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil...with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that you may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom” (Small Catechism). This saving truth is our dearest treasure. For it brings hope to the

hopeless, life to the dying, praise to the sullen, peace to the troubled, victory to the defeated, and eternal salvation to the condemned.

*Madysen and Patrick, today, you will pledge undying devotion and fidelity to this crucified King of the Jews. The promises that you will declare before God and His people are the same that all of us here made at one time in our life or another. To renounce the devil, and all his works, and his ways. To hold fast to faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as He is revealed in the inspired Holy Scriptures. To hear God's Word and receive the body and blood Jesus in the Holy Supper so that you, under God's grace, can live according to God's Word in faith and deed until your life's end.*

*Father of grace of mercy, "open Your heavens today over these children. Come down upon them, lay Your hand upon them, press them to Your heart, and bless them. Bless them with the fullness of Your gifts, bless them with Your grace, bless them with the power of faith, with ardent love, with joyous hope, and with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Bless them with all the weapons of righteousness for a victorious struggle. Bless them with protection from all evil, with patience and comfort in affliction, with a blessed hour of death, and finally with an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them. Amen! Amen! Yes, Yes, it shall be so. Amen." (C.F.W. Walther in Gospel Sermons Vol. 1, p. 200.)*

King Jesus rode into Jerusalem to win for Himself a blessed, heavenly kingdom of grace and eternal glory. On the cross, King Jesus is crowned and glorified. We worship no other Savior than the crucified and resurrected King of king and Lord of lord. In the cross of Christ we glory because in that blessed King we find love and joy unspeakable and filled with glory; in that King we find our salvation (I Peter 1:8–9).

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” A blessed and joyous Holy Week to you all, dear saints of the crucified and risen King of the Jews.

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.