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

Palmarum/Sunday of the Passion

March 25, 2018

Text: John 12:12–19 w/reference to Matthew's Passion

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

Palm Sunday – the Church's great day of joy, praise, and victory. Jesus enters into Jerusalem surrounded by the praise and adoration of God's people. Everything is finally coming together. Three years of public ministry – teachings, miracles, signs and wonders – have been building up to this day; the day when Jesus can ride into Jerusalem as the King of Israel.

What a scene it must have been. Hundreds, maybe thousands shouting Jesus' praises. The young and old gather palm branches and wave them in festive jubilation while shouting those glorious words from Psalm 118, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Things would never be the same again. I'm sure that's what the crowd thought. And they were right – things would never be the same again. The King has come.

Jerusalem – the holy city of God – was filled to overflowing with Jewish and non-Jewish converts from all over the Roman Empire. They came to celebrate the Passover, the climatic event of Jewish religious life. Families would travel back to Jerusalem singing psalms and hymns as they entered the holy city. The Passover feast commemorated their great deliverance from Egyptian bondage. And it provided hope for future deliverance from Roman oppression. God's people prayed for the long-awaited royal Messiah, the greater Son of King David.

And now they have a man upon which to place their hope. Jesus, the miracle worker. The one who raises people from the dead. John, the gospel writer, makes it very clear that many in the crowd shouting "Hosanna!" are there because they've heard that Jesus raised a man named Lazarus from the dead. If He can do that, then why not shout, "Hosanna!" and wave palm branches in victory and hope.

That miracle-working Jesus is coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The word shoots through Jerusalem at amazing speed. The curious, the devoted, the

skeptics, they all gather to see Jesus (and maybe Lazarus too). What a scene it must have been! Future hope and glory were staring right at them.

Israel's promised King did come. Of that, dear saints of God, we must know for certain. Salvation history is coming to fulfillment on this day. Nothing would ever be the same after this royal entrance into Jerusalem.

Some five hundred years before that first Palm Sunday, the prophet Zechariah told Israel that their King was coming. He wrote, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt." If God's would listen to and heed the teachings of Holy Scripture, they would know who and when. Every detail is important. Humanity's salvation was dependent upon what was taking place when Jesus entered into Jerusalem.

In fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, Jesus rode upon a borrowed donkey, not a horse, but a donkey. It's an animal of peace and humility. King Jesus would enter Jerusalem not to wage war against her citizens or even the Romans. No blood would be shed on His account. His warfare would not be according to the ways of this world.

Make no mistake about it, however, Jesus was going into Jerusalem to win for Himself an eternal kingdom. He would wage war against the powers of sin, disease, death, and the devil. His only weapon of warfare would be His complete obedience to His heavenly Father. No blood would be shed on His account. It must be the other way around. In love and obedience, Jesus will shed His blood on our account, for us and for our salvation. St. Paul describes it this way in Philippians 2:8, "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." It's not without reason that we read the account of Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper, His arrest, trial and crucifixion from Matthew 26-27. It's the story of Christ's humbling Himself for the salvation of His people. Never forget dear saints, Jesus loves you and me and every single human being. He loved to such an extent, He gave willingly of Himself to death upon Calvary's cross.

But Palm Sunday is also the reminder that Jesus is also our victorious king. Paul continues his description of our Lord Jesus, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:9-10).

King Jesus would win for Himself a kingdom and a special, redeemed people. You gathered here today, are fruits of that great victory. Through King Jesus, your sins are forgiven, wiped away, and His Holy Spirit is given to you to live and dwell within you. Palm Sunday marked the final march of our Lord to win you for Himself. That's why things would never be the same again after that first Palm Sunday.

And those palm branches, well, they too signified what was about to happen later in Jerusalem. Palm branches are a symbol of victory. They even make it into the description of the heavenly liturgy. Revelation 7:9–10 describes the redeemed hosts of heaven this way, "I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues standing before the Lamb clothed with white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

The crowds were declaring Christ's victory by waving their palm branches and shouting Hosanna. Was the crowd thinking about their Messiah being crucified and then rising again from the dead on the third day? Certainly not. But Jesus is the one taking the lead here. He knows what He's doing. For it is the Father's good and gracious will that He suffer, die, and rise again that we might be His holy and blessed people.

Jesus doesn't wait on us to understand the whats and the where fors. And more often than not, we'd get it wrong anyway. Our Lord Jesus does things differently. He follows the wisdom of His Father not our fallen human understanding. Do you remember what Jesus did when they came and told Him that Lazarus was sick? Jesus waited another two days before leaving for Bethany. In the meantime, Lazarus died. Our Lord had told them, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (Jn. 11:4). For Jesus, death is nothing more serious than a nap. He called Lazarus back to life as easy as we awaken our loved ones from a light mid-afternoon sleep. And so shall it be on the Last Day. Our Lord will resurrect our bodies from the grave and reunited them with our souls. And so shall we live in divine glory, body and soul, for all eternity.

This is how it is for us Christians. We always look at and interpret this temporal world in light of the eternal world to come. Even though we face hardship, trial, and persecution every day, we celebrate and rejoice in our resurrection victory even before we experience it in its fullness. That's what the Sacraments are all about. The apostle Paul says that through baptism we are united to Christ's death on the cross and His

glorious resurrection. We live in and celebrate Christ's resurrection every day we live in faith. The Lord's Supper is a participation now in the eternal, heavenly feast described in the books of Isaiah and Revelation. It's a meal of joy and salvation.

So we wave our palm branches in the face of sin, death, the devil, persecution, and despair. Through Christ, we are triumphant even though we are not yet in heaven. No matter. We rejoice now. And so shall we rejoice for all eternity. The victory belongs to Jesus. We are invited by our Lord Himself to come along with Him in His triumph.

Nothing would ever be the same again after that first Palm Sunday. Jesus takes the events of Holy Week – the Passover and the Passover sacrifices, the Saturday Sabbath rest, and Sunday, the beginning of a new week – and packs them with new, life-giving meaning. The Passover finds its fulfillment in the Lord's Supper where Jesus does not offer another lamb for sacrifice but His own body and blood to be received in faith for the forgiveness of our sins. After Good Friday, no other sacrifice is required or needed. Jesus is the final, perfect sacrifice that atones for all sins.

The Saturday Easter Vigil reminds us that Jesus' rest in the tomb over three days sanctifies the graves of all His faithful people. And so to this day, we do not mourn as those who have no hope. For all Christ's children who die in the faith rest in Jesus, who is our Sabbath rest. Because of Jesus, Sunday is no longer just the first day of the week but the dawn of a new creation. Through Jesus' resurrection on that first Easter, all things are being made new, whole and complete.

This is what the triumph and rejoicing on Palm Sunday is all about. Our King who comes to us in humility but achieves great victory and triumph. This is the day of the Lord's salvation. Let us be glad and rejoice in it. This is our week of great joy, victory and celebration.

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”

✠ 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.