

**St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
Palm Sunday  
March 28, 2021**

**REJOICE! YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU!**

(Zechariah 9:9-10)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold your King is coming to you;  
Righteous and having salvation is He,  
Humble and mounted on a donkey,  
On a colt, the foal of a donkey.

(Zechariah 9:9-10)

Our chancel is decorated with palms today, for this, of course, is the day we call Palm Sunday, the gateway to Holy Week. Another name for this date is "Sunday of the Passion," for this is the day that ushers in the very climax of our Savior's passion, the suffering, and death of our Lord Jesus for the sins of the whole world.

Centuries before our Lord Jesus was even born into this world, prophets of Old Testament Israel pointed to his substitutionary death. Then, in the New Testament, all four evangelists give us details of what happened in that last week of Jesus's life in his state of humiliation. A third of Matthew's Gospel, two-fifths of Mark's gospel, and one-fourth of Luke's Gospel is devoted to telling the things that happened when Jesus humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

On Sunday, the first day of that crowded but holiest of weeks, Jesus made his triumphal entry into the capital city of Jerusalem. He was hailed with the singing of Hosannas. He was greeted with the messianic term, "Son of David." His path was carpeted with palm branches and the outer garments of many people—residents of Jerusalem and the surrounding region. They were visitors from distant places who had come all the way to Jerusalem and the temple in order to celebrate the yearly Passover.

You see, in the ancient Middle East, when notable people came into the city in those days, people would often honor them by placing palm branches on the path before them. Palm trees were fairly plentiful in Palestine. So, on this Sunday before the first Good Friday, when Jesus came to Jerusalem, many people cut Palm branches to place on the road and street before Jesus.

It was 520 years before Christ was conceived and born into this world that the prophet Zechariah, a priest of Israel, foretold this very event of the Palm Sunday entry. His words have been preserved in the sacred pages of Holy Scripture in order to call out to us and to everyone: “REJOICE! YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU!”

Zechariah, the human author of our text, is known as the Prophet of Hope. He prophesized at a time when the people of Israel were without hope and sadly needed it. About 79,000 Israelites had just returned from captivity in Babylon, and later, Persia. Now they were back to resettle their former homeland, to rebuild their homes, their cities, and their temple, which decades earlier had been torn down and fallen into disrepair. You can imagine how they felt coming home to all of this. Jerusalem was a broken down shell of what it had been. There was continued frustration with all the difficulties and delays. Many of the people were so disappointed that they shrugged their shoulders and basically asked, “What’s the use in trying?”

Well, to these discouraged and apathetic people came the prophet Zechariah with encouragement and hope. He urged them zealously to rebuild the temple, the house of the Lord, for God knew that this would be a much needed rallying point for the people to have faith in their future. The rebuilt temple would serve as a visible embodiment of God’s presence among them, the assurance of better days to come, when God himself would actually come and tabernacle among his people. The prophet Zechariah told them that they should indeed repent of their sins, but also that they could have the sure and certain assurance that God himself would wipe out their transgressions, that they should prepare their hearts to receive with joy and exultation the true Messiah, the Savior, whom God, their heavenly Father, would send them.

And so, in our text we hear Zechariah call out to those despondent and discouraged people, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout with joy, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you.” What an encouragement that sure and certain word from the prophet of God was to that small, ragtag group of returned exiles, working and living in the midst of Jerusalem’s ruins. They were still God’s chosen people! The Messiah would come someday to them! Granted, his arrival was still centuries off, but from God’s eternal perspective, their salvation was already as good as done. Nothing in all the world could stop the lord from fulfilling his precious promises made through the centuries.

For this reason, the people can turn from frustration to exultation, from heaviness to happiness. The prophet encouraged them to rejoice, to exult, to leap for joy, to shout and tell others of their extreme pleasure and the reason for it. “Your King is coming to you!” says the prophets. The Messiah is King in the supreme sense of the word. He is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of the tribe of Judah, of the royal houses of David, who himself established Jerusalem, the royal city. And of his kingdom there will be no end.

This King of Kings was coming to them, yes, to those people, even though they were at the very brink of despair. He was coming for their protection, for their deliverance and salvation. Surely this was reason enough for them to rejoice and shout for joy.

What's more, this King is "just and having salvation," says the prophets Zechariah. This righteous Messiah would come to deliver his people. Yet he would not need all the horses and chariots and battle bows, the archers and swordsmen that were usually considered essential by the conquerors of that day. Rather, he would rule by the sword of his mouth, his word. That word would assure people of the peace that surpasses understanding, the lasting peace that the world cannot give. It would guarantee them forgiveness for all their transgressions, guidance amid the perplexing problems of the present time, and the assurance of God's limitless love for the days and years ahead. By this word of the lord, the Messiah's kingdom would spread to the nations, to all people, north and south, east and west. His righteous rule would extend from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River (the eastern boundary of Palestine) to the ends of all the earth. What a marvelous prophecy for those people in the depths of their depression! What great assurance to heighten their hope!

And, you see, this prophecy finally and assuredly came to pass on that first Palm Sunday. Listen again to those words of the prophet coming to us down through the halls of history: "Your King is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." You see, God wanted to make clear through the prophet that this promise of King of Kings could not be confused with other earthly kings all along the way. He would not come typically as the head of the mighty army, riding in proud splendor on a decorated and spirited warhorse. He would not come on a full grown, powerful animal, but on a young, untrained, and unbroken animal, still running with its mother.

Remember how when Jesus told his disciples, "behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles, to be mocked and scorched and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day," remember how the disciples tried to stop him. Especially Peter pleaded with Jesus not to go. All the disciples seemed to have heard the first part about the suffering and death, but not the last part about the resurrection. They tried to talk Jesus out of going to Jerusalem, but Jesus never flinched. Nothing could divert him from this primary mission of going to the cross to redeem this world of lost, sinful people.

When he and his disciples came to the little town called Bethphage on the Mount of Olives – the very ridge from which he would ascend into heaven a little more than a month later—Jesus chose two of his disciples to obtain an unbroken donkey – one that had never been sat upon – that he knew was in the village below. The two disciples never questioned Jesus further, but simply went on the errand on which they were sent. Exactly as Jesus had predicted, they saw the young donkey with its mother outside a house. As they were untying the animal, the owner came out, no doubt protesting their right to untie his donkey. He probably said something like "Hey, what are you doing with my donkey?" and the disciples

simply answered as they were previously coached, “The Lord has need of them,” and the owner permitted the disciples to take them at once.

Then Jesus sat upon the beast, and it started down the gentle slope toward the city of Jerusalem. Soon people gathered along the path and carpeted it with palm branches and with their garments. They called out, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!”

Were there perhaps some people in that crowd whom Jesus had earlier helped or healed? Perhaps there were some who had been healed from that dreaded disease of leprosy. Maybe there were some whose eyes had been blind, but now they could see Jesus coming to his own city of Jerusalem as “Great David’s greater Son.” Who knows—perhaps that man with the withered hand that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath was now waving his now-healthy arm along with the rest of the greeters. There were even little children joining in the sound of praise.

But there were also some who did not join in the happy Hosannas. In fact, they were angry because the people called him the “Son of David.” You see, that was a term reserved only for the Messiah. And these detractors asked Jesus, “Why don’t you bid the crowd to be quiet? Why do you allow them to hail you as their Savior? You see, they thought Jesus was encouraging blasphemy. It never occurred to them that Jesus was entirely deserving of this. We can picture Jesus smiling at them and remarking, “Why, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” There’s no way Jesus was going to silence these jubilant people. It would have been like denying his very divinity, like denying that he was indeed the Christ!”

Matthew gives the account of Jesus’ triumphal entry and says it’s the fulfillment of this passage from Zechariah: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” The evangelist John says the same thing, but he also notes that Jesus’ “disciples did not understand this at first, but when Jesus was glorified, they remembered that this had been written of him.” You see, the Bible does what no other book can do. It accurately foretells events long before their occurrence. And this happens more than 300 times in the case of Jesus, far too frequently to be just a matter of chance or coincidence.

The call of the Prophet Zechariah sounds down to us in this church today: “Rejoice! Your King is coming to you.” He is with us as we gather to hear his gospel and receive his sacraments. St. Mark tells us that Jesus entered Jerusalem, went into the temple, “and looked around at everything.” What he saw there displeased him greatly. He was hurt and angered that some were trying to turn his father’s house into a den of thieves. Then he was not just “gentle Jesus, meek and mild,” but his eyes flashed, and his muscles—developed and hardened by years at the carpenter’s bench—rippled as he overturned the tables of the money-changers, driving the greedy merchants from the sacred precincts of the temple court.

Our King comes to us and looks around today. He looks not only at the outward appearance, but into the hearts of all. Remember, our very bodies are now his temple and the temple of his Holy Spirit. Without the righteousness given in our baptism, would Christ like everything that he sees in us? Every one of us, young, middle-aged, or senior citizens, must confess as Paul did when he said, “the good that I would, I do not; the evil that I would not—that I and up doing.” Have we always made good use of our speech? Have we always kept God first in our lives? Have we kept our lives free of lust, greed?

What can we do about the terrible reality of our many sins? Nothing whatsoever. But thank God that he has given us the assurance of our forgiveness in Jesus Christ already through the water of Holy Baptism, and he reaffirms that forgiveness, life, and salvation as he gives us his own body and blood. “The Lord has laid on him, Jesus, the iniquity of us all.” “God made Christ to be sin for us... That we should be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

Baptized into Christ, God makes us his children and heirs of heaven. We are not just pieces of driftwood caught in the current of life. We are not like the leaves that are torn from the trees and twisted and turned by the winds. No, because our heavenly King has come to us and has given himself for us, we are precious, blood-bought children of the heavenly father—of the highest nobility possible. That has already been established by grace, through faith. We’re not saved by works but by grace. Just the same, while we’re here, we want to live as God’s children and citizens of the kingdom of the King of Kings. Then, when Christ comes again on the last day, we will be raised up to live in that new heaven and new earth forever and ever.

As the cry goes out this day, “Rejoice! Your King is coming to you,” confess him as your King of Kings, you’re one and only Savior. Serve him with all your heart until his angels come to escort you to him in heaven. Praise, glory, and honor be to him, both now and eternally. Hosanna to the Son of David!

Amen.