

Palmarum

14 April, Anno Domini 2019

Zechariah 9:9-12

Pr. Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Palm Sunday is perhaps one of the single most manic days in the Church Year. In a matter of mere moments we go from the victorious and joyous procession of palms, to the veiling of the cross with black cloth and reading the Passion narrative of our Lord. Why not just have Palm Sunday and save Jesus' death for Good Friday?

I think that perhaps those who put together the lectionary saw the beauty and significance of the contrast. A time of great joy seemingly swallowed up by a time of unimaginable sorrow and darkness. But more than that, the beautiful reality that the truth of the Palm Sunday processional cries actually find their answer in the man stripped of every last bit of dignity, and raising His voice in a cry of agony before dying the sinner's death, forsaken by God. This is the King of the Jews. This is your King, O Christian. Though blinded by unbelief, the soldiers were absolutely right to bow the knee before Jesus and hail Him as the king of the Jews. And not just King of the Jews but King of all creation. It was precisely in His being marred beyond human semblance, reviled, blasphemed, crushed, and pierced that Jesus is Lord. There on Golgotha, the prayer of Hosanna was answered with a rock-splitting, temple curtain-tearing "Yes!" Because there, upon the blood-soaked and scourged-striped flesh of the truest man who is also true God, was laid all of our guilt. There Jesus ended Satan's tyrannical rule and raised the banner of victory over sin and death.

Darkness is going to descend upon us for the next five days as we draw closer to Mt. Calvary. It can at times become very emotional as we meditate on the unimaginable suffering of our Lord; even more when we face honestly the reason that it couldn't be any other way. However, what Jesus doesn't want you to do is feel sorry for Him. In the midst of our sorrows and contrition Jesus would have us rejoice because He gladly did what was necessary for us. The crowds didn't fully understand what was about to happen but they were right to celebrate and urge our Savior on nonetheless. The King has come to drive a spear through Satan's heart, to overthrow His enemies forever, and to establish His kingdom of righteous and peace to which all men are invited. "Yes, Jesus! Ride on! Ride on! The wrath and stripes are hard, the agony beyond human comprehension. But Your death,

and only Your death, will undo death for all men. Your judgment and condemnation will break the chains of sin that bind men to the pit of eternal judgment. Ride on, Jesus! Ride on and conquer! Ride on and crush the serpent's head by allowing him to crush your heel! Ride on and set us free! Hosanna!"

But, dear Christian, just as you should not give way to despair under Holy Week's shadow and the murder of our God, also do not simply rush past Good Friday and try to avoid the heartache. Slow down, set aside the fleeting things of this life and ponder the meaning of the dead God-man. There can be no true joy over a risen Christ if there is no true appreciation and joy over the dead one. The ugly Jesus, the one covered in man's spit and hatred, the one barely able to walk after being torn to shreds by the scourge, the one breathing in agony, is the hardest to look at because to look at that Jesus is to look at yourself. That Jesus forces you to confront the ugly truth of your own sin. The Jesus of Golgotha definitively says that your sins, every last one of them - your idolatry, your covetousness, your frustration, your worry, your dismissal of the Means of Grace, your withholding of your offerings, your unkind words, your selfish demands - all of them can only be sufficiently paid for by the death of God in the flesh. All who will dare to confront this truth will find suddenly nothing more beautiful than Jesus hanging on the cursed tree because He is there instead of you. He is there for you suffering in your place everything that should fall against you - all of God's wrath and judgment, the hatred of the world, Satan's rage and spite.

And when we can find true beauty in the cross then we can find joy beyond all telling in the resurrected Jesus who now lives, who ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God to rule over all things in heaven and earth. Because that Jesus is only the firstborn of the dead. All who believe and are baptized into His death will, just like Him, spring forth from their graves to stand for all of eternity, singing endless Alleluias and Gloria Patri's, rejoicing in the perfect peace of God's presence. Together the cross and the empty tomb promise that this life filled with affliction and suffering and death, anxiety and starvation, arguments and disobedient children, guilt and sorrow, will have its end and all who trust in Christ Jesus will follow in His train to the unsurpassable joys of heaven.

And even more, today your King comes, riding not on a donkey but on the humble beasts of Word, bread, and wine, bringing the blessings of His kingdom of grace and mercy and forgiveness right here into your very midst. He doesn't come to judge you. He doesn't come to lay heavy burdens upon you. He comes to save you. He comes to rescue you. He comes to lift you out of the ashes of death and to give you joy for your sorrow, hope for your despair. He comes to bring the

fruits of His cross and grave so that you may have them as nourishing food to carry you in your time of suffering until your own resurrection. He comes to fill your ears again and raise your wearied hearts with the promise of sins already forgiven on the cross - not partially or contingently - but completely and freely. He has come to lift the terrible burden that lies on your conscience and leaves you afraid of judgment, hesitant in prayer, sluggish in faith.

He doesn't come in great power but in great humility, not to be served by you but to serve you, to bear your griefs and your sorrows and your sins, to comfort you in your mourning and suffering. He comes to teach you the true knowledge and fear of God and to give you His Spirit of humility so that having been served by your Lord you may likewise offer your life in service to your neighbor in his need.

So let us follow the royal procession to Golgotha. Let us walk the week of Holy with our attention fixed upon the Lord Jesus. Let us lay aside all that so easily entangles and distracts and rejoice again in the great mystery of our salvation - the God-man, Jesus Christ, crucified for sinners. And let us receive Him with repentant joy as He comes bringing with Him the blessings of His cross.

In the Name of +Jesus.