

Passion Sunday w/ the Procession of Palms
27 & 28 March, Anno Domini 2021
St. Matthew 26:1-27:66
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! What a joy it is to have so many of God's children here to celebrate the beginning of Holy Week. Last year, this Sunday was very different as we were in the beginning weeks of the pandemic and only a handful of people were able to be present. I went back and watched and there were six people in procession. Praise be to our heavenly Father who has graciously seen us through the depths of the pandemic and brought us relief so that so many of God's children can be here again to wave their palm branches in the joy of Christ's triumph over death and the grave. Yet we are still mindful of our brothers and sisters who are not yet able to be with us and pray that the Lord would hasten their return so that their voices may be joined with our own.

Perhaps the events of the past year can help give us some perspective and appreciation for the fact that we are here today, making our way in procession around the temple of God, singing hymns of praise and glory, and approaching the altar of God. What is our source of joy this day? Why do we lift up our Hosannas? What do we want to be saved from? This past year, what fear bubbled very clearly to the surface? The fear of death. The fear of the end of our life in this world. But are we only celebrating that things weren't worse; that we didn't get sick or if we did that we didn't die? Is our joy simply the fact that the lockdowns and mandates in our state are over and the pews can start to fill again?

We have missed the point if that is all we are afraid of. In fact, if that is our greatest fear then the incredible magnitude and joy of not only the procession this day, but, more importantly, the Passion narrative we just read together will be lost on us. If nothing is more terrifying to you than not being alive in this world, then what Jesus endured for us is useless.

That is, in part, why we have begun (and, hopefully, continue) the practice of reading the Passion of our Lord according to St. Matthew responsively. Besides keeping you awake, it puts into your mouth words that perhaps you'd rather not say - things like "Is it I, Lord?", or "I don't know the man" or "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Hearing these words from our own lips serves as a wonderful reminder that the death of our bodies is far less than we deserve. These words

belong as much to us as they do to those who first uttered them. We have betrayed the Lord by choosing the world's silver over the gifts of life and salvation that He freely bestows. We have reviled our Savior by trusting in our works and other idols. We have denied Him with our lips and our lives by our silence in the face of false teaching and our willingness to pour the world's filth and poison in our ears, eyes, and mouths. We have fled from Him. We have turned away in shame and we have sought to protect our lives, our possessions, and our positions in this world by making friends with tyrants and murders and sacrificing the sinless Son of God. For all that and so much more we deserve the full outpouring of God's righteous wrath against our sin. It should be us crying out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" - though we would certainly know that answer to the question. There is a tsunami of reasons that God should forsake us and leave us to suffer the consequences and judgment for our foolishness and rebellion.

The righteous wrath of God and eternal judgment should be our greatest fear - our only fear. Not death. Not the judgment of the world. Not poverty or sickness or suffering. All of these are only symptoms of the eternal death of sin that threatens all of humanity. We may be able to alleviate some of these symptoms temporarily, but finally our sin and guilt must be dealt with. The perfect justice of God must fall against your attempts to grasp at equality with God, your discontent with being a servant and steward.

And that is the cause of our Hosannas. That is why we wave our Palm Branches and rejoice to hear St. Matthew and the other evangelists' accounts of our Lord's death and resurrection. God has dealt with our sin and guilt. His justice has been met. God Himself has focused His wrath on His sinless Son and forsaken Him. You never have to ask God why He has forsaken you. Though time and again we forsake the Lord and despise His mercy, though we deserve nothing good from God's hand, the Lord Jesus proceeded in humility into Jerusalem to be betrayed, abused, condemned and abandoned and offered as the atoning sacrifice on our behalf. All that we deserve from God and instead He willingly, gladly bestows upon us righteousness and salvation because of the offering of the Blood of Jesus.

All that we have heard today is the answer to all your fears - the fear of your judgment, the fear of sickness and death, the fear that your suffering is the punishment of God. God's anger against your sin has been spent in its entirety on Golgotha. The terror that plagues your conscience has been answered by the Lamb of God who went silently to the slaughter, receiving all of the accusations that would rightly be made against you. The Lord Jesus was rejected by man and by God. Every vile and false word that you have spoken has been answered by the

forgiveness of Christ as He hung on the cross. Every murderous and adulterous thought that you have given room in your mind has been paid for by the the sacrificial murder of God's only-begotten Son who led a perfectly chaste and decent life in faithfulness to His beloved Bride, His Church.

Because there is no more payment needed for your sin, because the death you deserve has been died for you by Jesus, because you have traveled through the waters of the font and be raised to new life with Christ, you have no reason to fear anything and every reason to shout "Hosanna in the highest!" God has answered your prayer for mercy and deliverance by suffering your condemnation in His own Flesh, Flesh which is now given to you to still the raging storms of guilt and fear inside your conscience, to assure you that death has no power over you. The Flesh and Blood of Christ bestow upon you Christ's own eternal life, His victory over death and the grave. Not just today, but every time you process forward to this altar, you do so not as defeated enemies but as victorious children waving the victory palms of faith and singing the praises of He who once came in humility, who now comes bearing righteousness and salvation, and who will come again in glory to receive His children into your heavenly and eternal home.

May God the Holy Spirit stir up in our hearts a continual remembrance and deep hunger for those things that for a time have been so difficult to receive. May we treasure above all things the life that is ours through the Lord Jesus Christ who is among us this day to forgive our sins and remove our fears and bless us instead with the eternal joy of our salvation. Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.

In the Name of +Jesus.