

Palmarum with the Rite of Holy Baptism for Norah Naomi Gefaller  
2 April, Anno Domini 2023  
St. Matthew 26-27

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

The shift this morning is jarring and it is meant to be. One minute, waving palm branches and throngs of people crying out praising Jesus. The next, betrayal, lies, scourges, and nails. And how even more poignant that we should be filled with such joy at seeing our gracious Father wash and cleanse Norah from all her sins and receive her into His kingdom only moments before we see that very kingdom established in the Passion of our Savior. But don't let the contrast of the hosannas and the shouts of murder confuse what is happening or draw you into some kind of sorrow for our Lord. It is because of the betrayal and the lies and the death that there is salvation and redemption for Norah and for you. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem will culminate with His triumphal entry into the Holy of Holies, offering His Blood as atonement for us.

Do not take this week as an opportunity to feel sorry for Jesus. Understand, as we have seen in our study of Revelation, the sacrifice of Jesus the Son of God and the Son of Man, causes all of heaven to rejoice, not weep. Though the angels could have poured forth from heaven and put an end to the whole thing, they didn't. They wouldn't. Their will and joy is the will of God the Father, and His will was to crush Jesus for your sin so that He could wash you clean in Baptism and raise you with Jesus to eternal life.

This ought to be a week of holy and solemn joy for us rather than sadness and pity because it is our salvation being accomplished. It is not even a time for us to try to drive ourselves into some contrived extra deep sorrow over our sin. Repent, most certainly. Acknowledge the great depth of your sin and the degradation of your heart. But sorrow over your sin isn't forgiveness. Your salvation is found only the death and resurrection of God's Son. It is the events we see again this week which hold before us with the greatest clarity the compassionate and merciful heart of God toward us sinners.

And that is what we need as we wait for our crucified and risen Jesus to return. We need to know and be assured of what is clear and certain, that which God has declared and brought about, because so much is unclear and uncertain. The number of names on our prayer list seems to grow by the week. More suffering. More

sorrow. More struggle and sickness and death. We are like the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus has said many difficult things. He has spoken of a betrayer in their midst. He has spoken of great suffering and death. He has told Peter in no uncertain terms that he would give up the faith and deny his Lord three times that very night. He has told the whole band of apostles that they would all run and flee and leave Him alone when the Father strikes the Good Shepherd. That is an immense amount to digest and process. It is no wonder their eyes are heavy as they close their eyes to pray and find themselves drifting off. The anticipation of the unknown and fear of what is coming weighed heavily on the heart of Him who knew all things and would suffer not simply the torture of His holy Body but the wrath and judgment of God against the sin of all mankind. It drew His sacred Blood from the pores of His Body. Is it any wonder then that it overwhelmed those whose faith was anything but perfect and whose flesh was weak?

Many of you for reasons that the rest of us know and all of us for reasons that we don't, are struggling to stay awake, to watch and pray with our Lord as the night of this sinful world draws on and the fear of suffering and death pulls our hearts and minds down and away from Jesus. Right now, the Hosannas and Alleluias feel like a distant memory. Will we ever sing them again? Tornados reach down out of the sky to tear apart homes and snuff out life. Sinister diseases consume our bodies, wracking us with pain and filling our minds with fear. Bank balances get smaller and smaller as prices rise higher and higher. The wicked and perverse world relentlessly forces itself in front of our faces wanting us to participate in its vile worship of everything that is repugnant to God. Everywhere we turn it seems darkness is gaining the upper hand.

The Spirit of God who has made us His temple is certainly willing. We want to remain faithful. We want to pray more, read the Bible more, resist more, be in church more. We know we need these things. We want to doubt less, fear less, sin less. But our flesh is weak. It is ready to give in to hopelessness and despair. It wants everything that is evil. It doubts the goodness of God's will and we begin to wonder whether we want God's will to be done. How can it be good if it means I have to suffer or if those whom I love have to suffer because of me? What if God's will is that I lose my job or that my loved one dies? What if His will is that I die? How is that good? We don't want the cross. Our hearts along with our eyes and our minds are weighed down for sorrow. We fear that our hopes and faith have been misplaced. Perhaps we are not forgiven. Perhaps our sins are catching up to us. Perhaps our faith has been in vain.

Beloved children of God, take heart and lift up your heads. The cup of God's wrath did not pass from Jesus. Jesus alone drank the whole cup down to its very last and most bitter dregs. That is not the cup you drink from. The only death you suffer happened the day you were baptized and your Old Adam was drowned. There you were drawn up out of death. By being baptized into Christ, His death is counted as your death. Because He died, you also have already died to sin. Now the cup that you drink from the Father is the sweet, life-giving cup of salvation, the cup of Jesus' Blood which has secured for you the full forgiveness and love and mercy of God. The cup you drink contains not a single drop of God's wrath.

Your suffering is not the suffering of judgment and it will not actually harm you. More than that, God promises to make your suffering good and holy and blessed. And if you would know how your suffering that right now is so bitter and painful can actually be good, behold Jesus who is no longer dead, whose Passion and suffering are over because death, your death, has been overcome. The suffering of Jesus ended in resurrection and eternal life. So too will yours. That was promised to Norah this morning. That was promised to you the day you were baptized. Truly, your resurrection has begun though it is not yet complete. Your flesh may yet be waiting to be purified and resurrected but you are already children of God who is the God of the living, not the dead. You have already been washed clean, completely clean, of all your sin. Your prayers are heard before the throne of God as sweet and pleasing incense. As alive as Christ is, so are you. As pleasing to God as Christ is, so are you. Even in the hour of His cross, Jesus trusted that His Father would faithfully deliver Him according to His promises. And He most certainly did. Though Jesus still had to endure death, His Father didn't not abandon His soul to Sheol nor did He let His holy One see decay. God drew Him forth out of death and the Good Shepherd, once struck down, stepped forth from the tomb to lead His flock out of death. There could be no empty tomb of Easter without Good Friday's cross. But because there is Good Friday's cross, there is Easter's empty tomb. And because there is Easter's empty tomb, there is the certain promise that your tomb will likewise be empty on the Last Day and you will be by His side, gathered with the whole Church of God in the unending life and peace of God. Jesus has turned death into life for all who pass through it with Him in the waters of Baptism.

Do not fear either death or suffering. Take up your cross with the promise of God that He will deliver you and grant to your body as He has to your soul the rest of eternal life. Though your eyes grow heavy with sorrow and you have not been able to keep the watch and pray against temptation, your Lord has kept the watch and prayed for you. He has prayed for your strength and deliverance. He has prayed for your salvation. And He has provided you nourishment and assurance that you may

endure the night. He has given you His Word that His promises may remain before your eyes and in your ears. He has given you the gift of absolution so that you may not doubt but firmly believe that your sins are forgiven and that your crosses are not for your harm but for your good. He has given you Holy Baptism that you may be certain that you belong to Him. He has given you His Holy Supper that you may remember and proclaim His death and feast upon His life and that He may impart His life to you.

Baptized of the Lord, let this week of our Lord's Passion fill you with joy and peace. Let it drive away the sorrow that makes your hearts and eyes heavy. Let the true glory and deliverance of Christ's cross fill you with hope and the peace that passes all human understanding. The hosannas and alleluias will fill our mouths once again not only for a time but for all eternity as we join the whole company of heaven in its unending praises of our God.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.