

Palm Sunday Sermon

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The Coming of Jesus' Spiritual Kingdom

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Palm Sunday is one of the most fun Sundays in the Church Year. Even at the most no-nonsense congregation, children can enjoy processing to the familiar song of “All Glory Laud and Honor” while waving palms. It’s a jubilant reenactment of Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Indeed it is a triumphant entry. Yet, Christ’s coming into Jerusalem is unlike the procession that might follow a king or great military leader. Jesus doesn’t arrive in a chariot or even upon a mighty steed. Rather, he rides a lowly donkey, too humble for a prince or ruler. He isn’t met by leaders of the city. No emissaries of the palace greet him at Jerusalem’s gate. And the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Scribes, take no pleasure in his arrival. They hate that the crowds follow him. Sure Jesus has a large following, a loud crowd that shouts “Hosanna!” And “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” You could say, Jesus has an obnoxious crowd, who wave palm branches in the air, congest the streets, and lay down cloaks and branches before a poor man and his borrowed donkey. Yet, this is not a distinguished crowd. No super delegates in this parade. No princes or court marshals, high priests or rulers of the Synagogue. The parade looked like child’s play. It was a *pretend* triumphal entry. A show. An act. It was an excited crowd, but no one of importance would take him seriously. So was the thought process of those in authority.

Jesus’ triumphal entry was fun. A game for children and the simple minded. That was the idea then, and that is predominantly the idea now. Let the children play, but when things get serious, the adults need to take control. The real adults, those with *real* jobs, the strong, the wise, the important, they don’t

greet Jesus. They don't wave palm branches or lay their jackets down before him. Rather they mock and jeer. "Child's play is all it is. He's riding a donkey for Pete's sake. A real king would come in a chariot with an army. He's no king. He's no Christ." So were the thoughts of the intelligentsia of Jerusalem in the first century.

Isn't it the same mindset now? "Religion is for children and the simple minded. Send kids to Sunday school so they learn good morals and make friends, but when they grow up, they should put away childish things. It's fine for children to play pretend, but adults really need to enter the real world: and Jesus and his religious stuff really doesn't fit."

For those who witnessed what transpired by the end of the week of Jesus' triumphal entry, that mindset seemed to prove true. Jesus is welcomed by a bunch of misfits and children with a loud celebration, but when things get serious his playmates run away. Children armed with palm branches aren't going to protect Jesus from a band of soldiers armed with swords and clubs. And no one hears shouts of "Hosanna" that Friday morning, but rather "Crucify him!" The game is over. Jesus has entered the real world. His triumphal entry was a premature celebration.

I'm sure that was the thought of the chief priests and Pharisees, as they lay their heads on their pillows that night to enjoy peaceful sleep as Jesus' disciples cowered behind a locked door. But Jesus' triumphal entry isn't child's play. Sure he entered lowly on a donkey, but listen to the Prophet Zechariah:

"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." (Zech. 9:9)

Jesus fulfills the prophecy of God! He enters humbly, but that is what God said he would do through the prophet. And what does Jesus bring? Righteousness and salvation! These children and simpletons are obeying the Lord's decree. Their shouts are mandates from God, foretold by the prophet centuries earlier.

Jesus' ride into Jerusalem is triumphant. It's humble and seems a bit silly, but that's only if you compare it to an earthly king. If the Roman Emperor were to enter Jerusalem, the city would not be able to house his soldiers or stable his horses. King Herod himself would leave his palace and greet him with a bended knee. The Chief Priests and Pharisees would push the children and simpletons away in order to get an audience with the grand Caesar. That is what happens when an earthly king travels within his kingdom. But Jesus is not an earthly king. And he doesn't have a kingdom of this world. And he doesn't fight a battle with swords and clubs. If our Lord meant to establish an earthly kingdom, he could appeal to his Father in heaven and march into Rome itself with 12 legions of angels and sit on Caesar's throne. But Jesus is a heavenly king, his kingdom is the kingdom of God, and his battle is with sin and death.

The crowd shouts, "Hosanna" which means "Save us" and that is exactly what Jesus is doing. He's coming to save the people from their sins, from damnation, from eternal death. They call him the Son of David and king of Israel. That is exactly what he is. He is David's Son and David's Lord. True God and true man, Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah. He is not like an earthly king who brings taxes and submission. He is a heavenly king, who brings righteousness and salvation.

And how does Jesus save? He humbly lays down his life. He permits himself to be betrayed, even though he knows who his betrayer is. An earthly king would have killed the traitor and prevented his betrayal. He permits a band of armed crooks to arrest him, foregoing the thousands upon thousands of mighty angels eager and ready to destroy anyone who would touch their Sovereign. He willingly suffers lies, spitting, mocking, beating, scourging, even crucifixion. He suffers physically in a way we don't want to imagine. And his soul bears the guilt of my sins. Your sins. The sins of the entire world. Christ, the

only righteous man who ever lived took the unrighteousness of all mankind upon him. He makes *you* righteous and just by removing your unrighteousness, your unjustness, your sin, and he wears it as his own before his Father. He cries, “My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me!” Because even his heavenly Father pours out his wrath upon him, his wrath against all unrighteousness and sin.

Christ’s battle is spiritual. He takes away your sin that would send you to hell by placing it on himself. And by doing so, he disarms the devil. Satan can’t accuse you of sin for which Christ has forgiven, and Jesus died to forgive all sins. Christ’s battle cost him his life and soul. He gave up his spirit when he breathed his last. And in his glorious resurrection from the dead, Christ demonstrated that he did all this for us and not for himself. If Christ had any sin of his own, any unrighteousness for which to suffer, he would not have risen from the grave. If Christ’s death were insufficient in any way, he would still be in that tomb. But Christ’s triumphal entry was made complete when he broke the seal of that tomb. Christ won righteousness (that is a right relationship with God) and salvation (that is eternal life in God’s kingdom) for all.

Christ’s triumphal entry can only be received in faith. Otherwise it looks like child’s play. Unless you believe the words of the prophet, “Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he” you will not see Christ’s procession of palms as anything significant. Christ’s suffering and death can only be received in faith. Unless you believe the words of prophecy, “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed” unless you believe these words, Christ’s passion looks like the unfortunate end to a not-so-significant man. Yet, if in *faith* you believe that Christ’s dying is for your sake, then you know that *his* death is your triumph over death. Christ wins for you righteousness and salvation- even eternal life.

As Christ's triumphal entry was belittled in the minds of the elite, so is his coming to us today. Baptism is looked at as just a symbol, an act. "Water and words certainly can't do anything," is the consensus of the world. The Lord's Supper is seen as a cute memorial meal; an exercise of devotion, but certainly nothing that can give forgiveness of sins and salvation. The gifts of God given in church are belittled by those of high intelligence and even members of the flock are tempted to doubt the power of God's Word. "Listening to the preaching of God's Word is a waste of time. It doesn't accomplish anything. Maybe going to church a couple times a year might be good to keep good morals, but more than that is excessive and weekly is downright crazy." These are the thoughts of the world. Perhaps Satan even tempts you to have them as your own thoughts.

The world will belittle the sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The world will despise God's Word. Observing such things seems as childish as a procession of palms. "What will your baptism do for you when your loans are due? Will the Lord's Supper take away stress? Will a sermon do anything but bore me?" But it is by these gifts that Christ Jesus comes to you today. It seems lowly, like a grown man on a little donkey. It may even seem silly like children singing and laying down palm branches. But God chooses that which is foolish to shame the wise. With the faith that sees Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as triumphant, and with the faith that sees Jesus' suffering and dying as a victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil, with *that* faith you will see baptism as a precious treasure that gives eternal life. You will see the medicine of immortality in the bread and wine of the Supper. You will believe that God's Word will not return empty, but will strengthen your faith, forgive your sins, and make you righteous before God.

Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem lowly. Those of faith greeted him with loud shouts, just as the prophet said they would. Jesus chose to go willingly to the cross, and God healed us by his wounds, just as he said he would. Christ chooses to come to us in Baptism, in his Supper, and in the preaching of the Word. That is how he chooses to make us his children; to feed us with eternal food; to create and sustain

saving faith in us. Such means of entry are laughed at and despised by the super smart and adults of this world. But for you children of faith, these are the means of grace. These are the means by which Christ comes to you to deliver his gifts of righteousness and salvation, which he won on the cross. So rejoice daughter of Zion and shout aloud, daughter of Jerusalem. Your king comes to you; with righteousness and salvation, humbly he comes to you in words of forgiveness and under the form of bread and wine. So as the children with joyful smiles and palm branches in their hands, receive your king.

Amen.