

Sunday: Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion

Date: March 28, 2021

Text: Zechariah 9:9-12

Title: The Coming King of Zion

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

Please pray with me.

Today as we celebrate Palm Sunday, we are lifted to emotional highs along with the people of Jesus' day. As we hear the gospel reading from John 12 at the beginning of our service, we are drawn into the grand celebration that marked the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The cries of the people lifted up in adoration of the Son of David trip off the tongue and ring in our ears. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (v 13). What a sight it must have been to see the crowds waving palm branches as they come to meet the Messiah. As a tribute to him, they lay down their branches before him and sing praises to him. Calling to him "Hosanna", "save us, I pray." The road lined with adoring Israelites, many of whom had heard of the raising of Lazarus. What a welcome to the City of David, Jerusalem.

As this Sunday is also the Sunday of the Passion, we hear the rest of the story found in the gospel of Mark. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem is but the beginning of Holy Week. As the days pass, the celebration wanes, the preparation for the Passover begins, and Jesus' journey to glory will be completed. As the plans of the religious leaders unfold, we find Jesus ultimately tried before the Sanhedrin, accused before Pilate and Herod, found innocent, yet beaten, mocked, and scourged. Finally, the innocent Nazarene is ordered crucified. This final week of Jesus' life brings wild swings of emotion still today. From the thrill of seeing Jesus entering Jerusalem to the horror of watching him die, hung on a cross like a common criminal, we ride an emotional rollercoaster. The impact of all of this made even more poignant as we realize the sinless Son of God humbled himself for the broken and sinful of this world, you and me.

In our Old Testament reading today, the prophet of God, Zechariah, describes the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem hundreds of years before it occurred. His depiction of the entrance into the City of David provides some incredible insight into who the Messiah would be and what his mission would be. Just like in the

prophecies of Isaiah, we find hope and joy in the proclamation of the gospel that points to Jesus of Nazareth.

Zechariah describes the arrival of the king at Zion, “righteous and having salvation is he.” As Jesus rides toward Jerusalem, salvation is nearing its completion. The Christ will spend his final week preaching and teaching in the City of David. Jesus will continue to teach with authority and provide correction for the wayward paths the religious authorities had led the people. Jesus identified by John the Baptist as, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), returns to his Father’s house. The new temple, Jesus, visits the old temple in Jerusalem. The dwelling place of God, Christ Jesus, visits the former dwelling place of God, the site of Solomon’s temple destroyed by the Babylonians and now the location of the temple restored by Herod.

“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.” This would be an unusual way for a king to enter into the city. As the leader of the military, he would normally ride on a great steed. A great and mighty horse wearing armor and adorned with royal colors. He would be the center of attention as the grand leader of the people and the champion of battle. The military might of the nation would support him and follow him as he made his way to his palace. The people would line the road and cheer for their royal leader.

But Zechariah describes a different procession. Yes the king is adored by the crowds, but he is not entering Jerusalem as a military leader. He reflects the very humility and humbleness Paul speaks of in Philippians 2. Jesus enters into the city as the Son of God,

who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8).

Jesus’ fulfillment of this prophecy reflects the nature of his kingship and his kingdom. He came to serve not to be served. Jesus by becoming “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world,” has come to disarm the might of physical monarchies. In Jesus the powers of this world, military might and political power will no longer have the ability to impose their will on God’s people. Jesus by his actions will speak peace to the nations. The King of kings

and Lord of lords, Jesus, will sit on the throne of David forever. His kingdom will be one of peace. No longer shall people weep over the pain inflicted by their leaders. In Jesus' kingdom the lion will lie down with lamb. All Christians will join in the wedding feast of the lamb in his kingdom.

As Jesus rides into Jerusalem in humbleness, he moves forward with God's plan of salvation to set the prisoners free. All people who suffer in bondage to sin and death will be freed by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. All who believe will be welcomed to the new heaven and earth upon Jesus' return.

As the prophet writes,

Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double. (v 12).

As an adopted child of God, our time of struggle and suffering under the weight of sin will end. We will be released from our imprisonment under the brokenness of our corrupt nature. Christ's death on the cross paid the price for our rejection of God and His will. Jesus paid the price for the sins of the whole world. He freed all people from the wrath of God.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17).

As Jesus entered Jerusalem on a humble donkey, his focus was on completing his journey to the cross. He thought of you, me, and all people who were prisoners to sin. His desire to save all people from the devil and condemnation is reflected in his total obedience to his Father. Through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, we receive the greatest gift of all. Mankind will have the perfection of Eden restored to it double. For all who believe, we will share in the eternal kingdom, where we will see our Lord face to face, and live in peace and joy forever.

As we gather for Holy Communion this morning we see and taste once again the gifts of our Lord. Humble to save, giving us what we need to build up our faith, strengthening us for the trials of this world. As we follow this humble king, awaiting his return when he will judge all people and bring us to be with him into eternity in the kingdom of heaven, we celebrate with all the company of heaven singing Hosanna in the Highest, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.