

## **In Nomine Iesu**

### **Palmarum, the Sixth Sunday in Lent 2023 The path of the Christ – Luke 19:28-44**

“And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, ‘Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ And they said, ‘The Lord has need of it.’ And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples.’ He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.’”

“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Savior King. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

A lot of people don't really listen to preaching anymore. That is why a lot of preachers don't really preach anymore. They talk. They opine. They philosophize. Some even tell jokes. Preaching has become therapy in our day. So often the only response a person can offer to what the preacher says is, “Well, that was nice.” Through the six weeks of Lent we have heard about the blood of Christ that sets us free in order to prepare ourselves to enter into Holy Week and thus the suffering and death of Christ. Crucifixion, suffering and death are not subjects likely to draw a response of, “Well, that was nice.”

#### **I**

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John never recorded anyone who left one of Jesus' sermons saying, “Well, that was nice.” People either hated Him and wanted to kill Him, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, or they found the foundation of their existence shaken and their hearts, minds, and lives changed, like the tax-collectors Zacchaeus and Matthew, or the sinners Mary Magdalene and the Samaritan woman. There is no neutral zone, no lukewarm in-between place with the Jesus of the Gospels. That is not to say that there was no one in the middle. But all the neutrals, all those waiting to see which way the wind blew, stood against Jesus, even if they were convinced that it was not so. “Well, that was nice,” was not a possible response from anyone who listened to what He said.

This was very much the case with the people of Jerusalem. Many, of course, welcomed Jesus with open arms on Palm Sunday. They cried out the familiar words of Psalm 118, “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Yet, five days later the chief priests and elders were able to smooth out the bitter rivalry between the arrogant

Sadducees and the self-righteous Pharisees, and win over the complacent multitudes of Jerusalem long enough to permit the trial and condemnation of this Jesus whose words so angered and unsettled them. The authors of the gospel accounts never specifically dwell on this huge complacent middle group. But they existed, just as they exist in every culture, in every country, in every age. This large middle group was the very reason for Jesus' warning to us all, "You cannot serve two masters." They were the cause of His saying many times that one must either be for or against Him.

This is the problem of the modern Church: People go home from far too many services thinking, "Well, that was nice." The law that was preached touched on a sin or two we are familiar with. That is to be expected. But so long as such sins are only mentioned the sermon remains nice; and the preacher can be reminded that filling the offering plate goes better with nice stories and practical lessons for life. But don't start hitting us where we live. Don't challenge the foundation of our lives. Don't teach us absolutes of right and wrong. The world is full of grays. Our feelings and preferences suit us just fine. Our familiar sins are just that, familiar, and you're not against the familiar and comfortable are you? So, why should we change? That was fine for Zacchaeus and Matthew, for Mary and that Samaritan woman, but we are 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans. We have outgrown the stark black and white of the Bible.

Dear friends in Christ, we have not outgrown what the Bible says about sin and the need for repentance. The Kingdom of God is at hand. It is as immediate and near us as it was when John and then Jesus first proclaimed it to be at hand. The hour of salvation is upon each of us every time we hear the good news of the gospel following the condemnation of the law. And none of us knows when our last hour will come, when night will fall for us for the last time. And so the message of God's word remains the same: Repent while it is day, before the night comes when no man can work. So, let us confess our sins. Let us acknowledge our wretchedness. Don't doubt, but believe. Look to Christ and there, in Him, you will find healing, restoration, and rest. You will find peace with God.

## II

Jesus rode into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday knowing full well what was waiting for Him. He looked past the joyous crowds, the curious observers, the thinly concealed hatred of the chief priests and scribes, to what lay at the end of His path. He knew that when He got down from the donkey's colt He would be in the midst of sinful humanity, the good, the bad, and the ugly that is in each of us. He knew what our rebellion against God would cost Him. He had been on this path from the moment He came up out of the Jordan, baptized by John, bearing the sins of the world. He would drink the cup of His Father's wrath toward all the evil man had done. He would suffer agony in His soul for the sins of the world. He who knew no sin would become sin for us, so that justice could be carried out in Him. The Father in heaven would forsake His Son to suffering, death, and the torments of hell. He would die shamefully naked and bloody in the sight of His people, in the midst of sinful humanity, hung between two thieves, one of whom would believe Him and one not. And then on the third day, He would rise from death's strong grip triumphant. Only then would death be dead and the grace of God made known.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem as King. His entourage was fishermen, tax collectors, women of ill repute and women of no repute. Their only glory was that they were sinners, who repented. His honor guard was the lame, the deaf, the mute, who, having met Him, now walked, heard, and cheered. His hosts the previous night accompanied Him also, the two sisters of a man dead four days, who now walked with them following the Son of David, the Messiah. The crowd saw Jesus, saw His entourage, honor guard, and hosts – who all bore witness that He is the Messiah – and the faithful, those who looked for redemption

in Israel, all the sons and daughters of faithful Abraham, hailed Him as the One who comes in the Name of the Lord to save them. They waved palms, carpeted His path with branches and garments. They rejoiced at His coming, seeing in Him the Prince of Peace entering the City of Peace (for that is just what the name Jerusalem means, “city of peace.”) He came to bring the peace that passes all understanding. He came to His city of martyred prophets, despised priests, and neglected kings. He came to stand in the midst of the temple, and there proclaim that He would destroy the temple and raise it again in three days. This was the path of the Christ.

He who rode into Jerusalem, rides still. For on the night in which He was betrayed, the night before He gave His Life, He gave the substance of that life to His disciples, and to us. The body that bore our sins, the blood He shed on Calvary, the blood that washes sinners clean, He distributes today in the Supper that we rightly call the Lord’s. There He makes you one with Him, because you cannot travel across time and space to stand beneath His cross. Perhaps, a fine moviemaker can get you to think that you have done that, but it is only an image on the screen. But Jesus’ cross is not old and rugged. It is gone, along with all the other sights and sounds, people and things, that filled Jerusalem in those fateful days. The only bridge from there and then to here and now is He who promised, “wherever two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)

Our Prophet, Priest, and King, the Savior of the world, did not conquer and leave. No, He who came into the midst of sinful humanity to redeem, has stayed among us, even as promised. He promised to be with us “to the end of the age.” Rejoice then, as we enter Holy Week once more. Rejoice that He who came to His people still comes, bearing not the sins of the world, as once He did, but bearing all the benefits of His cross, suffering, and death. He comes to us in word and sacrament, to give to us all that He won for us on His cross, forgiveness of our sins, life in the midst of the death that is all around us, and eternal salvation that will be ours in heaven.

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Yes, life is hard. There is not enough time in the day. The struggle against darkness and evil is tiresome. There is always the strong desire in us to have peace, any peace, to go along to get along. But the truth is that you’ll never get out of life alive, even if you try to be neutral in all these things, even if you think of the things said here today, “Well, that was nice.” Our Lord entered Jerusalem on the Sunday before His atoning death. He entered the city in order to recruit all of the world’s fallen sinners, all of the want-to-be neutrals and fence sitters, and rally them to His side, to make of them – to make of you! - His entourage and His honor guard, His royal priesthood, and lead you out of death to eternal life. Rejoice then that Christ our King followed the path of His exodus to the very end, drank the bitter cup of His Father’s wrath toward your sins to the bottom in order to win the victory for you, and still comes to you bringing forgiveness, life, and salvation. His victory is yours. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**