

April 10, 2022
Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday
John 12:20-43

If you know anything at all about World War II Pacific theater history, you know about the battle of Midway. After the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941 the United States kind of struggled to get its act together against the Japanese. The Dolittle raid on Tokyo was good for morale but could hardly be called a military victory. The Battle of the Coral Sea stopped the Japanese advance but was kind of a stalemate after which Japan still seemed to have the upper hand. But after the U.S. fleet sunk four enemy aircraft carriers at Midway in June of 1942 America was top dog. The country celebrated. There was a lot of war to be fought and blood to be shed, but people kind of knew we were going to be victorious in the end.

I think we can look at Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem in that same light. Who is it that rides down from the Mount of Olives that day? The Son of God, true, but much more than that. On that donkey is a flesh and blood, body and soul human being just like you and me. Well, just like you and me with one big, big difference—this human being is righteous! For thirty-three years Jesus has lived and breathed in the fallen, broken world and faced every temptation that is normal to man and He has not faltered even once. Even before the cross Jesus has triumphed over sin in that sin simply could never master Him.

We don't think about that battle too much. We naturally go straight to the cross. But if Jesus didn't live that perfect human life the cross wouldn't be possible. Had Jesus sinned He couldn't be the perfect sacrifice for our sins; He'd have to pay for His own. That He arrives in Jerusalem perfectly righteous is a victory for us! The outcome of the war is assured, because now the righteous One only has to die to win the victory!

Yes, the Son of God arrives in Jerusalem that day. But more importantly for us, the Son of Man arrives in Jerusalem that day. And the human righteousness that exists only in Him because of His perfect obedience is conferred upon us as a gift in the means of Grace—the Word and the Sacraments. That Palm Sunday precession is indeed a victory parade for Jesus.

And yet, the war still must be brought to its end. The bloody part was yet to come. And truth be told, Jesus' greatest temptation may have been when the crowds called out at the cross, "Save yourself!" We could understand that temptation. Who, in the midst of great suffering, is not willing to do whatever it takes to bring the agony to an end? Jesus with a word could have stopped it all.

But we have to remember that Jesus is not only suffering on the cross; He's battling.

This truth puts the cross in a different light. After Midway thousands of Americans in the army and marines endured hellish battle after battle as they island-hopped their way through the Japanese occupation and toward their homeland. They suffered, but they did not turn back. Why? Because they weren't just fighting for themselves. They were fighting for their people. They were fighting for their families and friends back home. They were fighting not only for their own lives, but also for the lives of the ones they loved.

It's the same and more so for the crucified Christ. Jesus is battling on the cross and when He looks down upon those mocking Him and railing against Him, He is looking upon those for whom He battles. And in that I think any temptation to save Himself is brought to nothing.

We describe this man on the cross in many ways; Son of God, Son of Man, Savior, Redeemer, the Christ of God and rightly, God Himself. He is all of those. But what Jesus is first and foremost on the cross is perfect love, doing battle for the object of that love. Battling for you.

Battling for me. Battling for the humanity that spurns His love so often in so many ways, but battling in perfect love because perfect love is His perfect nature.

When Jesus prays, “Father, glorify your name,” the answer from the Father in heaven is “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

That first glory may have been glory in heaven, or glory in the miracles Christ performed on earth, I’m not sure. But when we see Jesus crucified in battle to redeem us from sin, God is being glorified, because His incredible love for His loveless creation is on full, glorious display. It is horrible to behold in its heinous cruelty and injustice, and yet it is the most magnificent display of grace and mercy of the mighty divine above us having for an evil and undeserving humanity below.

In this glorious battle, the war is all but won.

So when you consider the passion of Jesus, don’t do so from afar, as if you’re a spectator off at a distance somewhere. No, see it from the foot of the cross. See the dying Jesus looking upon you, his teeth gritted together in the pain of battle while His eyes gaze upon you with unyielding and unending love. Know that He does this specifically to save the ones He loves, His people, His family, you, from the enemy that would take you from Him. He does this more than willingly, He dies intentionally perhaps even eagerly, to save you from sin and death because He loves you more than you can possibly comprehend.

Know this is absolutely true and gloriously good. Therefore repent, and believe in the Gospel.

Amen.