

March 24, 2024

Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday

“No Doubt”

John 12:12-19

The procession into Jerusalem is a bittersweet event. As children in Sunday school we tend to view it somewhat like a Mardi Gras parade with Jesus triumphantly riding through the streets of Jerusalem with massive crowds on either side joyfully shouting His praises.

Now some elements of this are most certainly true, but other important points may get lost in this picture.

First of all, this procession isn't so much triumphant as it is filled with expectation. In the first century triumph would be riding in on a warhorse, not a donkey. You could say Jesus is being somewhat kingly, as Israel's kings in ages past had ridden donkeys. Solomon did when he was named king. But this crowd has big expectations, hopes that He is indeed going to turn out to be the promised king of the Jews. They shout “Hosanna” which means “Lord, save us.” They rightly view Jesus as someone who yet has a mission to accomplish. They are looking to Christ for deliverance. Deliverance from what? Well, I guess that would depend on who you're asking. Believe it or not, folks had a whole lot of varying ways to understand “He will save His people from their sins.”

But in the end, I think humility best describes this procession toward the city. I mean Jesus is, if fact, the Son of God...but He doesn't really look like it. While the crowd may have been loud and boisterous, it wasn't intimidating or powerful. The Roman garrison would have reacted to that. It was certainly filled with wonder about what might happen next, and that's what make it bittersweet. It wasn't a secret that the Jewish leaders wanted to put an end to Christ. Even the disciples had talked about the possibility of them dying with Jesus if they came to the city. Jesus Himself has told them quite plainly why He is here. He's here to be murdered. In Luke's Gospel account we're told that Jesus laments the destruction of the city because of the rejection He will suffer here.

So at the end of this parade as Jesus dismounts and enters into Jerusalem there is an air of uncertainty surrounding Jesus. Everybody is perplexed by this humble rabbi who has done such mighty wonders. The Jewish leaders are uncertain of their next move to destroy him. The crowds are uncertain if Jesus is going to campaign for leadership, immediately instigate a rebellion or call down fire from heaven to destroy their enemies—or get killed by Jewish leaders. The disciples are probably most confused of all, believing Jesus the Messiah but wondering what His game plan is and why there has been all this strange talk of dying and rising again.

And you know what? That's fine for them. Nobody could fathom what God has in the offing here. Uncertainty is somewhat in order here. Everybody is in wonder, awaiting the next move. It's almost like a cliffhanger ending of a TV episode, leaving the audience on the edge of their seat waiting to see what happens next.

But that was them. That's not us. You'd think I wouldn't have to say that, but how many of us know Christians who are full of uncertainty, expecting something more from God? How many of us have been uncertain, maybe in some dire situation, wondering “God, are you going to come through for me or what?” Perhaps you are there right now, on a cliffhanger, expecting God to do something big, and if He doesn't, well, then something is wrong with Him and His plan.

I'm talking about the big picture here. I mean sure, if you've got Covid and you're high-risk you're going to wonder, even pray, “God, are you bringing me through this or are you calling me home?” That's fine and good.

I'm talking about despair. I'm talking about distrust. I'm talking about thinking that everything is not going to be wonderful in the end.

Folks, we have the whole story. All evil, all sin, all death, everything bad of this fallen world that might assault us here—it's all on display in that horrible account of Christ's Passion that we just read. It is there, all being brought to nothing by Jesus. There is no cliffhanger. We all know what we're going to celebrate next Sunday. This is true. There is nothing uncertain about what Jesus has accomplished.

This happened. The historian Josephus writes of Christ's execution. Hundreds of witnesses come forth to proclaim the outcome of this story, even though it was of no worldly benefit to them to do so—in many cases it meant hardship to proclaim Christ crucified—yet they still did it because they couldn't help but proclaim such a wonderful truth! So any horror of your life, any horrible sin of yours, any horrible sin done against you, any affliction you are suffering, the very death of you that is approaching—it is all there on Christ, and He has dealt with it on your behalf. It is done.

St. Paul, in uncharacteristically concise fashion, lays the truth out plainly. *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being 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. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Jesus did it all for you, and now He reigns over you...now...today. Whatever evil nastiness you are suffering—He reigns as Lord over that also. The death you are dying...He reigns as Lord over that. There. Is. No. Uncertainty.

Jesus. Is. Lord.

We kind of mimicked the Palm Sunday parade as we marched into the sanctuary this morning. But a huge difference between ours and the original is that those Jews 2000 years ago really had no idea what they were getting in the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth. We know exactly what He gives to us.

We marched in, we sang and then what happened? The invocation—the proclamation of the name of God into which you stand baptized into the truth of His death, His resurrection, His eternal life. It's done. It's certain.

Next—confession and absolution. The announcement that because God's promise stands fulfilled in Christ, your sins are forgiven. No doubts. No ifs, ands or buts. Your sins are forgiven and nothing stands keeping you from the presence of God for all eternity.

And coming up—the very body and blood of the resurrected Jesus put in your face with the promise of Jesus Himself—“for you for the forgiveness of sins.” There is no equivocation about what God, not you, what God is doing there is Christ.

Do not doubt. Jesus went to the cross and tomb. He didn't stay there. He got up and claimed Lordship over everything, every sin, every enemy, every plague, every evil, every death, and it all lies powerless before Him. And he did it all for you.

So simple, simple message this morning people. Stop doubting. Nothing is uncertain. Jesus Christ is your Savior and He has done the deed. Jesus Christ is your Lord. He comes to you; righteous and having salvation is He! No longer humble on a donkey—glorious in power, and His rule is over everything, especially that which would separate you from His eternal embrace.

Rejoice in the truth. Do not doubt. You belong to Christ the Lord, this day and forever!

Amen.