

Sermon for March 29, 2015 – Palm Sunday

**Zechariah 9:9,10 (NIV84)**

Theme: **See, your king comes to you . . .**

- 1) Righteous and having Salvation,
- 2) To establish His Kingdom of peace.

<sup>9</sup> *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* <sup>10</sup> *I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

Pep rallies are important. They unify a school behind its team. They energize athletes – getting them to realize that they aren't just playing for themselves, but for all their parents, teachers and classmates who cheer them on.

Even though pep rallies are predominately an “American” institution, the idea behind them is very ancient. Through out history, Kings would march their armies through encouraging crowds as they went off to war. Cheering family and friends encouraged the soldiers. These were the people they were fighting for.

I don't mean to sound trite, but Palm Sunday could be compared to a pep rally for Jesus. His final battle was close at hand. Even though He didn't need human encouragement to win our salvation, we also have to remember that Jesus, according to his human nature, felt more and more anxious as the hour of his death approached (a fact we will consider in more detail on Maundy Thursday). I am sure that the devil plagued him with thoughts like: “You know the horrible suffering you will have to endure if you want to do your Father's will. You are the Son of God. You don't have to go through with it. Why are you doing this, Jesus?”

I wonder if this isn't yet another reason God the Father ordained Palm Sunday from eternity. Now, Jesus certainly didn't “need” this encouragement (just like a team doesn't really “need” a pep rally to win a big game), but as crowds of men, women and children gathered around Jesus – treating him like a king and asking him to save them with shouts of “Hosanna” (which literally means: “Lord, please save us”) – how could this not (humanly speaking) renew his focus to win our salvation? It's true that the crowds didn't quite understand what they were saying, but Jesus most certainly did.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: we certainly do not celebrate Palm Sunday in order to encourage Jesus in his work of saving us. Why not? Because His work is all done! Nevertheless, it's still important for us to celebrate Palm Sunday. Why? So that we might become encouraged, focused and energized as we commemorate the events by which Jesus saved us from our sins. God wants us to care about his Son's cross. He wants us to recognize who Jesus is and celebrate His work for us.

Therefore, with the prophet Zechariah as our guide, let us consider who Jesus is and the victory He would win, under the theme: **See, your king comes to you. . . 1) Righteous and having Salvation, 2) to establish His Kingdom of peace.**

Part One: Righteous and having Salvation

Our sermon text was originally penned some 500 years before the events of Palm Sunday happened. The LORD saw the dangers facing his people whom he had recently brought back from captivity in Babylon. Even though their enemies were great, the LORD would not forsake them. He would send his appointed King to deliver them from all their troubles.

Who would this King be and how would they recognize him? Our text tells us that He is the one who would establish peace for his people. They would recognize him by the humble way he would enter into Jerusalem.

And so our text begins: *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!*

Jerusalem was the city and Zion the hill upon which the temple (the visible symbol of God's presence) stood. Jesus once said of his Church: *where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*<sup>i</sup> The daughters of Zion and Jerusalem, therefore, represent all those with whom God is present. They represent all believers. They represent us.

We, therefore, are the ones called to rejoice at the sight of our Savior on Palm Sunday. Why? Because He comes to us with the righteousness and salvation we so desperately need.

You see, even though we, believers, are all God's children through faith, we still have to contend with the selfish, sinful nature we inherited from Adam and Eve - up until the day we die. This sinful nature wants to be its own god and master of its own fate. It does not want to submit to God's law. It tires of hearing His Word. Our sinful flesh would much rather be fishing than in worship. It would much rather be lying on the couch in front of the TV than sitting on a pew in front of a pulpit.

Even though God has graciously forgiven and restored us (just as He did for the Jews after their captivity in Babylon) we are still sinful. Dangers from the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh still threaten our souls. We are weak and need our Savior's continued mercy and grace; and this is why it is so wonderful to remember Jesus, our Savior, coming into Jerusalem *righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

The righteousness Jesus has is the righteousness we all failed to obtain. It is His perfect keeping of God's law: his selfless life of love toward His Father and all of us. This is the righteousness we need to stand before God, and He freely offers it to all who look to him in repentance and faith.

On that first Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem already a champion. He had overcome every temptation to break God's law. He was righteous. And, as a champion is ready to defend his title, so Jesus rode into Jerusalem with his eye on Calvary - ready to complete our salvation through his suffering, death and resurrection on our behalf.

It is important for us to remember Jesus riding into Jerusalem as our champion King. Why? Because it encourages us to repent! It encourages us to cry out: "Hosanna: Lord, save me from my selfish heart that refuses to give you its rightful place. Save me from all the sinful lusts that drag my mind away from you. Hosanna: Lord save me from all the guilt I have incurred by not keeping your Father's law as I ought. Hosanna: Lord, save me from the damnation my sins have earned, and restore unto me the joy of your salvation."

And, as we see Jesus riding into Jerusalem, our hearts do not shout these "hosannas" out of desperation, but in confidence and hope. We know that our gentle Jesus hears us for His name's sake. We are fully confident that He will forgive our sins and answer our prayers. Why? Because He is our Savior - proven by the way

He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He is our King on the colt – fulfilling every prophecy of Scripture concerning himself, who has come to establish His kingdom of peace.

Part Two: To establish His Kingdom of peace.

In order to establish a kingdom, an earthly king gathers his military, goes out to war and kills. But Jesus is no earthly king. He established his kingdom alone, without the aid of an army - not by killing, but by being killed and raised to life.

And what kind of kingdom did Jesus establish? An earthly king tries to conquer as much land as he can, but can never obtain the whole earth. Jesus does not conquer lands, but hearts; and his kingdom spans the globe. Understand, then, that when the Bible speaks about Christ's kingdom, it is not speaking of some geo-political nation. It is speaking about Jesus' gracious rule in the hearts of his believers.

The LORD says: *I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken.* Ephraim represents the northern 10 tribes of Israel, and Jerusalem the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Ever since Solomon's death, the kingdom had been split in two. Ever since the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests, God's people had been scattered throughout the ancient world.

The prophet Zechariah lived when the Jews returned from their exile in Babylon. They were small in number and weak in strength. Neighboring nations threatened their work of rebuilding Jerusalem and its temple. They were in a constant state of danger. But the Lord promised to watch over them. He encouraged his people to look forward to the day the Messiah would establish his kingdom and gather together all his scattered tribes - bringing peace to his people.

Understand, however, that the LORD's promise of reunification and peace applies to more than just the blood descendants of Abraham. Our text is actually promising a reunion of all believers from every corner of the globe. The Scriptures say: *Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.*<sup>ii</sup>

In other words, Jesus is promising to gather all believers, from every race, culture and nationality, together into his kingdom to grant them peace, as Zechariah prophesies: *He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

And what exactly does the peace Jesus came to establish consist of? First and foremost, it refers to peace with God. Because of sin, all people are born enemies of God – hating his law and deserving eternal damnation in hell. But Jesus restored our relationship with God by taking our sins upon himself and suffering the punishment they had earned. Because of Christ work, God reconciled himself to us – offering us forgiveness, life and salvation through faith in him.

And how does Jesus proclaim this peace to us? Through His Gospel in Word and Sacrament. God's Word tells us the good news of how Jesus suffered, died and rose again on our behalf. In Holy Baptism the Lord declares us to be citizens of heaven – adopted children in His house. Every time we receive his true body and blood in Holy Communion, it is as if we are receiving a presidential pardon from all sin. In all these means the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts – proving the peace God has declared with us by creating and strengthening the faith in us that we need to receive it.

And when Christ thus rules in our hearts, he not only establishes a kingdom of peace with God, but also with each other. With Christ in our hearts, we no longer look at each other from a worldly point of view, rather we see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Former enemies become friends. We who are different, all form one nation and are one people under one King. We all work together in love for one

common goal: the spread of his kingdom through the proclamation of His Gospel; and in this work we rejoice.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. As you remember the Palm Sunday crowd, cheering Jesus on with their shouts of “hosanna”, don’t let anything hinder you from joining their joyous shouts and song.

Rejoice, brothers and sisters, rejoice! See your King comes to you, *righteous and having salvation. He comes to establish His Kingdom of peace.* Cheer him on this week, as you remember His work. Why? Because you will soon discover that in the process of cheering him on, it is you yourself who will be encouraged. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Mat 18:20 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> Gal 3:7 NIV84