

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

John 12:12-19 Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

¹²The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the king of Israel!” ¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: ¹⁵“Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”

¹⁶At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

¹⁷Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. ¹⁹So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

MESSAGE:

First of all, congratulations to all of you who are about to be confirmed, and welcome to membership in Hope Lutheran Church! I hope this day shines in your memory as an important milepost in your lifelong journey with your Savior.

I'd like to begin this morning by reading once again the Epistle lesson for Palm Sunday from the *Book of Acts* which describes Peter's testimony before the Jewish ruling council—the Sanhedrin.

Acts 4:8-12

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.”

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Peter was a changed man. The moody, unpredictable fisherman who had boasted that he would follow Jesus into the very jaws of death and then proven to be a coward when the chips were down had turned into a bold witness. For the first time in his life, Peter was acting under the Lord's power and navigating by the Lord's wisdom instead of his own. What had changed him is simple: He had had a physical encounter with the risen Lord.

Now you confirmants probably remember how we talked in class about the fact that Jesus was both God and man. And I told you that it is usually easier for people to think of him as God than as a man. And that may be why Jesus makes a real point in the Scriptures of emphasizing his human-ness, his physical nature. After he rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples he said: “...*why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.*” Then he asked them for food and ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence.

The lesson was not lost on his disciples. Years later, John wrote about this experience: “*That...which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.*” John wanted his readers to have no doubts about the fact that Jesus was a physical human being who rose *physically* from the grave. Later, in the *Book of Revelation*, he makes it clear that when he beheld Jesus reigning in heaven, he was still a physical man who still bore the marks of the cross. John writes “*Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne....*” The physical crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the man-God is the crux of the Biblical witness.

After the Apostles died and the Christian faith was entrusted to the church, there were many who began to doubt that Jesus had ever been human at all. It was hard for people to accept that Almighty God could enter this world in the form of an ordinary human being. Some proposed that Jesus had really been a ghost or a phantom or an apparition which only *seemed* to be flesh and blood. One reason Jesus’ humanity was difficult for people to accept was that humans are sinful and God cannot sin. Another reason was that all human beings die, but God cannot die. But that’s because the world now lies under the curse of sin and death—but it was not always so. Originally, creation was not in bondage to decay. Eden would have lasted forever; Adam and Eve would have lived forever. But sin changed all that: the imperishable became perishable and the eternal became temporary. Here today, gone tomorrow; ashes to ashes and dust to dust.

But then the Christ entered this world, full of grace and truth and light, and once again God walked side by side with man—just as he had in the Garden of Eden. Christ brought heaven to earth in order to reverse the rule of death and corruption. To make perfect what was flawed, to make immortal what was mortal, and to make pure what was corrupt. And that was what Peter and the other disciples finally understood when they saw the risen Jesus: that they had been made pure, that they had victory over death, and had eternal life! *And the experience changed them utterly!* They were transformed from lukewarm, fair-weather friends who fled at the first sign of danger into fearless men who went out and gave their lives to change the world!

The change in them was obvious to everyone. Luke describes the Sanhedrin’s reaction to Peter’s words: “*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*” And when they commanded them to stop witnessing, Peter and John simply replied: “...*we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*”

These were men who had learned to rely upon a power far greater than themselves: the power of the risen Christ, the Savior of mankind.

Wouldn’t YOU like to be like Peter and John? To receive spiritual power that would carry you through each and every encounter you would have in life? To have no qualms about

confessing your faith freely and boldly and to know with certainty that there will be souls in heaven because of what you say and do? I'll bet you would. And the question is: will you spend your life wishing you could be that way—or will you take action to become that way? Because you can, you know! Becoming a bold disciple will be easier for you now than it will be at any other time in your life! And one of the ways of doing it is closer at hand than you may realize.

Just as the disciples had a physical encounter with Jesus and were filled with the Holy Spirit of God, today you are going to have a physical encounter with Jesus and be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. This morning you are going to go to the Lord's Table where you will share physically in the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus will enter you physically to cleanse you of your sins, to strengthen your faith, and fill you with the Holy Spirit. Today you are going to a feast where you will receive healing, forgiveness, and power for bearing witness to your Savior.

Beloved confirmands, you are entering a time of your lives when you will reach the peak of your mental and physical powers. Never will your senses be more acute, your bodies more resilient, your intellects quicker and your imaginations less encumbered. You are about to gain full possession of your faculties—including your power of choice. And that's a good thing because the choices you make during the next few years will affect you for the rest of your lives. Astronomers tell us that if the direction of powerful laser beam projected from the earth is changed one one-hundredth of a degree, the beam will reach an entirely different galaxy than the one at which it was originally aimed. That is the degree of magnitude we are talking about. Choices you make now can make huge differences later.

The most important choice you have to make is simply this: will you choose to walk in the light with Jesus or in the darkness with someone else? The darkness can be very appealing, you know. Probably not right now here in church, but on some other occasion, when some of your friends come up with a "cute" idea that just happens to involve a "small" sin. On occasions like that darkness will seem a lot like light. The knowledge of evil is an attractive thing. God's command to Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was clear and I'm pretty sure Adam and Eve didn't plan to disobey it. Still, *"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it."* At times, darkness can seem like light.

I can still remember the first night I was allowed to take the family car out for a date. Just down the road from my front driveway I stopped to get gasoline, and as the tank was being filled I looked into the station and saw a cigarette machine. It was bathed in light! And I thought: "I can buy a pack of Lucky Strikes and smoke them and my parents will never know and I will instantly join the ranks of the cool." I can still remember the smell of that pack of cigarettes and the excitement I felt buying it and lighting one up. At that moment in time, they were a darkness that seemed very bright. And you will face moments like that. You will be offered many opportunities to commit some small sin and buy five minutes of popularity with people you may not even like, but whose opinion will seem important to you at the time. Darkness will seem bright on those occasions.

But there is a better path you can choose to walk, a brighter path. It's not an easier path and it is not the popular path. In this world you can usually buy more approval with darkness than you can with light. But you will have the joy of knowing that you are dealing

with truth rather than with lies, with reality instead of smoke and mirrors, and that you are walking with your Savior instead of your enemy. As the poet Robert Frost wrote:

*Two roads diverged in a wood
And I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference.*

May you walk in the light of your Savior all the days of your lives! Amen.

Other Scripture Readings for Palm Sunday:

Zechariah 9:9-12 The Coming of Zion's King

⁹Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses 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. ¹¹As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. ¹²Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

Psalms 118:

¹⁹Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. ²¹I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

²²The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; ²³the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success!

²⁶Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. ²⁷The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you.

²⁹Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.