

April 10, 2022  
Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

John 12:12-19 (Luke 23:1-56; Philippians 2:5-11)

## THE SCANDAL OF THE CROSS.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St John, the 12th chapter, which you heard read at the beginning of the service.

Today is the first day of Holy Week as we near the end of our Lenten journey. Is it Palm Sunday or the Sunday of the Passion? Well, it's both! Yes, we remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. (cf: John 12:12-19) But we also hear the entire reading of Jesus' Passion. Yeah, it's a long reading but unless you gather in this place on Good Friday, or you read it aloud on your own, you likely never hear the whole story from beginning to end.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem was an entrance fit for a **king**: the crowds, the palm branches, the shouts of Hosanna. At one look at this celebration and you immediately know that it is a victory parade – but something is different. Unlike other victory parades, King Jesus doesn't enter as a **King of war** but rather as a **King of peace**. He looks more like a **beggar** than a **King**, looking as if He's already lost the war, not proudly mounted on a mighty war horse, but seated humbly a donkey, even a young unbroken and borrowed donkey at that! This King of Kings is not bringing the **spoils of war**, but His very own **body to be spoiled** upon the cross. St John records that:

***“His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.”*** (John 12:16)

The disciples didn't understand **these things**, that is, they didn't understand the significance of Him riding a donkey into the city until He was crucified and risen from the grave. Even though they spent three years with Him and knew Holy Scripture, they didn't know on that day prophecy plainly recorded in Scripture was being fulfilled in their presence. (cf: Zechariah 9:9) But that shouldn't surprise us because we know that sometimes when we're on a **journey**, we are easily distracted and take our eyes off the **destination**. So our Church Calendar keeps us focused on the destination so that we understand **these things** like Palm Sunday in relationship to the greater thing – that is – **when Jesus was glorified** through His death and resurrection.

Many times on the First Sunday in Advent, our Gospel text is not about the soon to some baby born in a manger but today's Palm Sunday story. Everyone loves a story about a baby, but instead of jumping right to the baby in the manger, the Church Calendar directs our attention to

the destination of Jesus' journey – His work of salvation on the cross. If Jesus wouldn't have come in the flesh of man to die, we'd have no reason to celebrate Christmas.

In the same way, today as we wave our palm branches, the palms mean nothing apart from Jesus' Passion to which they lead. Jesus did not come to Jerusalem for the shouts and accolades from the crowds. He came to die on the cross. He is the mightiest King *who is over* all other kings. He entered the Holy City on the final leg of the greatest war ever waged – His war against sin, death, and the grave.

Holy Week is not simply about the historical events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion but to announce to the world the Good News – that in the brutality of Jesus' suffering and death at the hands of sinful men, God was reconciling the world to Himself. It is why I point to this crucifix so often. In antiquity, thousands upon thousands of people were crucified, so an empty cross isn't very specific. Even in pop-culture the familiarity of the symbol of the cross and crown of thorns is well known, even among unbelievers. But that doesn't mean everyone has a proper and true understanding of the cross and crown of thorns. (KOŁODZIEJSKA, M. (2013). Symbol of the Cross in Popular Culture: an Analysis of the Use and Transformation of the Symbol in "Machina Magazine." *Polish Sociological Review*, 182, 209–222. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41969489>)

[pointing to the crucifix] But when you shove a crown of thorns onto Jesus' holy head and nail His hands and feet to a cross... when you behold a suffering, bleeding, and dying Savior on the cross – **FOR YOU** – it creates a scandal in which a lot of people prefer to soften or remove. But this is God making peace between Himself and you. It is Jesus crucified **FOR YOU**! Regardless of how scandalous or offensive it is to the human sinful eye, the harsh reality of the man Jesus crucified **FOR YOU** – it is something that requires reflection, soul-searching, and self-examination. Even for the most pious believer.

As Jesus rode humbly into the city to shouts of "*hosanna*" and "*blessed is He*," there is a lot going on behind the scenes. There is a whole demonic world, led by the devil himself, tempting everyone to give in to sinful human emotions: selfishness, greed, hatred, jealousy, and fear. Just a few days earlier Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. (cf: John 11:43) It is no wonder that so many people were following Jesus into Jerusalem. But many only wanted Jesus the miracle worker, or Jesus the savior of the nation of Israel. They hoped that Jesus would throw the Romans out and restore Israeli rule like it was in the days of King David.

The religious leaders were jealous and afraid that Jesus would take away their power and nation. (cf: John 11:47-48) They didn't want to lose their privileged position. They hated the fact that Jesus allowed people to worship Him and not God alone. The chief priests would eventually turn many in the crowd against Jesus. (cf: Mark 15:11) As the religious leaders were seeking a way to put Jesus to death, the greedy Judas conferred with them how he might betray Jesus to them, and they made an agreement for thirty pieces of silver. (cf: Matthew 26:14–16; Luke 22:2–6)

If you and I truly examine ourselves, we can find ourselves among the crowds. Not only in the Palm Sunday crowd mind you – but also among the Good Friday morning crowd shouting:

**"Crucify, crucify him!"** (Luke 23:21)

Even today there is a whole demonic world, led by the devil himself, tempting you to give in to the sinful human emotions that we call temptation and sin so that you betray your Savior. St Paul says:

***“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*** (Ephesians 6:12)

Selfishness, greed, hatred, jealousy, and fear come from deep within all of us. You try to hide it away in the dark places in your heart and mind. You see it in the world all around, and you can't stop yourself from being infected because it wells up from within your sinful flesh and is drawn to bear fruit within you by the temptations from the evil one. Jesus didn't ride into Jerusalem **only** to take on religious leaders and the forces of the devil. No. He came **FOR YOU**. Jesus did not come for the shouts and accolades from the crowds. He came to die on the cross to defeat the very enemies that haunt you: your sin, your death, and the grave.

When you behold a suffering, bleeding, and dying Savior on the cross – **FOR YOU** – it is something that requires reflection, soul-searching, and self-examination. Even for the most pious believer. In the cross of Christ, you see God's wrath against your own sin and death. The cross of torture and crucifixion was used for countless executions in the ancient world. [pointing to the crucifix] But this cross is now the altar of the Lamb of God's sacrifice.

***“Behold the man!”*** (John 19:5)

***“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** (John 1:29)

Behold the holy One of God who takes away your sin: your sins of selfishness, greed, hatred, jealousy, and fear that you hide away in the dark places in your heart and mind.

***“... the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:18)

... so...

***“... we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:23)

In the word of the cross, you receive the fruits of Christ's suffering, namely the forgiveness of your sins, and with it, new life and salvation which come from God alone. All of Christ's gifts won on the cross **FOR YOU** – were bestowed upon you in Baptism. Martin Luther once wrote:

***“... the life of a Christian, from baptism to the grave, is nothing else than the beginning of a blessed death. For at the Last Day God will make him altogether new.”*** (LW 35, 31)

Your destination is a blessed death in Christ and an eternal bodily life with your Savior forever. But when you are on a journey, sometimes it is easy to get distracted and take your eyes off the destination. So the Church Calendar keeps you focused on the destination. Jesus' birth in the manger and triumphal entry into Jerusalem were but moments on the journey of Jesus' glory, but it was not His primary glory. St Paul writes:

***“... though [Jesus] was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he***

***humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”*** (Philippians 2:6–8)

It is Jesus’ obedience, suffering, and death – FOR YOU!

Holy Week is not simply about the historical events leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion but to announce to the world the Good News – that in the brutality of Jesus’ suffering and death, God has reconciled the world to Himself. Through the glory of this single death on Calvary’s cross, the wages of all sins of all times were paid and God is reconciled with humanity. All who trust in Jesus for salvation are now at peace with God. As you journey through this life to your destination of a blessed death and bodily resurrection on the Last Day, you have our Lord’s promise that because of Christ’s humble obedience to the Father’s will of saving mankind from their sins, by His grace, you are today a new creation in Christ and on the Last Day God will be like Him and live with Him forever. (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:17, 1 John 3:2)

By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, God mercifully grant that you follow the example of Jesus great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection. (cf: Collect of the Day, Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.