

April 2, 2023  
Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

John 12:12-19 (Matthew 26:1 – 27:66; Philippians 2:5-11)

## THE UNEXPECTED

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

You have been expecting it. Today is Palm Sunday. It marks the beginning the holiest week of the Church Year – concluding next Sunday at the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord. As Jesus enters the Jerusalem mounted on a donkey's colt, He is at the peak of His popularity with the Jewish people – and – at the pinnacle of the disdain of the religious authorities. Following Jesus is a crowd that was there a few days earlier when He raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany. Lazarus died unexpectedly after a short illness. After decomposing for four days in the tomb, the Jews saw with their very own eyes the once dead Lazarus – now – very much alive. The miracle not only showed Jesus' power over death but it also set the stage for His own resurrection. These people were previously mourning Lazarus' death, but now are following Jesus, testifying about the great miracle that had taken place. (cf: John 11:19, 12:17)

Bethany is only two miles outside of Jerusalem. News of Lazarus being raised to life travels quickly to the multitude gathering in the Holy City for the Passover feast. From this multitude, a second crowd went out from the city to meet Jesus with palm branches and shouts of "*Hosanna*." (cf: John 12:13) But for the religious authorities, their contempt and scorn for Jesus only grew. Because so many were going after Jesus and believing in Him, they are continually looking for a way to kill Him. (cf: John 11:56)

It seemed that from that Sunday to Thursday Jesus was unstoppable in Jerusalem. He had nothing to hide. He drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers. He taught every day in the temple and all the people came to hear Him. (Luke 21:37–38) The chief priests and the elders also came to challenge His authority. Every time the religious leaders tried to trick Him, He turned the tables on them and left them speechless.

But Thursday night came the unexpected for Jesus' followers. After eating the Passover meal with His disciples and instituting the Lord's Supper, (cf: Matthew 26:26–35) as was His custom, Jesus took His disciples to the Mount of Olives. (cf: Luke 22:39) Going to a nearby Garden to pray, Jesus was betrayed and arrested. Friday morning He would be given a phony trial, brutally beaten to a bloody pulp, nailed to a cross where He would suffer and bleed until He died. Everything in Jesus earthly life and death happened according to the Father's will and to fulfill the writings of the prophets. (cf: Matthew 26:55–56) But it was all unexpected to the disciples – and they all left Jesus and fled.

Life does not always turn out the way you desire or expect. The older you get the more you discover how true it is. In your youth, your future was a blank slate waiting on you to make your

mark on the world. But it does not take long to discover that wants and desires get bogged down in the distractions and routine of your everyday work life. Perhaps you spend your daydreaming hours thinking, if only your marriage were better. If only your spouse had not died. If only you made a little more money. If only your kids would try harder in school their lives could be different than yours. If only you had *this* or could change *that* – *then* you would be happy. *Then* you would be content.

But – too often marriages grow cold, loved ones die, exciting careers turn dull, gifted children lose their way. You discover every *this and that* – that you thought would make you happy has made no impact on your life. And then, when you least expect it, tragedy strikes. Suffering, disease, and death disrupt your everyday life, waking you from your boredom and causing you to cry out in despair. “*God! Why would you allow this to happen? God, why does life always have to be so full of sorrow and pain and hurt?*” These are the ultimate questions all people must face and will face. These are the ultimate questions that can only be understood in light of the cross of Christ Jesus.

Just three days after Jesus’ scandalous death on the cross, He rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples and a few women. Over the course of the next 40 days, Jesus appeared to over 500 people. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:5–8) The risen Christ, as true God and true man, is strong and full of life just as He was prior to His death. But something had changed. The dark red wounds just above His wrists where the nails had ripped at His flesh and muscle no longer appeared grotesque and offensive. They appeared beautiful. When Jesus appeared to eleven of His twelve disciples on the first day of the week and showed them His hands and His side, they realized that the nails did not ruin their lives after all. (cf: John 20:19–23) Those nails saved their lives. Eight days later when the skeptical Thomas put his fingers in the nail holes and placed his hand in Jesus’ side he exclaims:

**“My Lord and my God!”** (John 20:28)

... confessing Jesus as His Savior. The nails had saved Thomas’ life.

The day is coming when you and all who are baptized and believe in Jesus will be standing before Him in glory and you, too, will be able to see the nail wounds in His hands and the mark where the spear pierced His side. You, too, will realize that although on this side of heaven, life did not always turn out the way you desired or expected throughout all your tribulation, suffering, and pain – yet everything that you thought had ruined your life was actually used by God to save it.

Nothing happens in this world outside our Lord God’s realm of authority. Nothing happens without His knowledge and permission. (cf: Isaiah 45:7) When you see Jesus face to face in glory, every single pain and sorrow in your life will perhaps not be forgotten, but will become a source of everlasting joy. You will realize that each of those trials and tribulations strengthened your faith and made you stronger. Each unexpected tribulation drove you to trust more fully in Jesus. Your cries of pain and anguish will one day be transformed into endless songs of praise.

Whether you realize it or not, Palm Sunday is referenced in every Divine Service during the Service of the Sacrament. In the Sanctus we sing aloud the shouts of praise from those first Palm Sunday crowds as the Jesus made His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. You sing:

**“Hosanna ... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”** (Matthew 21:9; cf: John 12:13)

The word Hosanna means "***Save us, we pray***" and comes from Psalm 118. (cf: Psalm 118:25) It was a shout of appeal and praise that was familiar to everyone in Israel. (cf: BDAG, 1106) And it is exactly what your Father in heaven has done and continues to do for you. He saves you from death and the grave and raises you to eternal life in the remembrance of your Baptism. He saves you from death and the grave and raises you to eternal life in the preaching of His Word. He saves you from death and the grave and raises you to eternal life in the eating and drinking of His body and blood in His Holy Supper.

Jesus' suffering and death were not what the people expected. But it was exactly according to God's plan of salvation for all mankind. Jesus did not have to go through all that pain and suffering. He is God. He is the creator of all pure and wonderful things, but He knew that you were a broken and sinful being, living in a broken and sinful world and in need of salvation. He knows your grief, your pain, and your sorrows. Because He loves and cares for you, for your salvation He came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man. He did not cease to be God but voluntarily divested Himself of His divine attributes, qualities, and majesty:

***"... empt[ying] 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 2:7-8)

... for you.

Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. (cf: John 1:29) As you sang in the first stanza of our sermon hymn:

***A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth,  
The guilt of sinners bearing  
And, laden with the sins of earth,  
None else the burden sharing;  
Goes patient on, grows weak and faint,  
To slaughter led without complaint,  
That spotless life to offer,  
He bears the stripes, the wounds, the lies,  
The mockery, and yet replies,  
"All this I gladly suffer."  
(LSB 438 A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth)***

Right now your sufferings seem to crush and annihilate everything you have hoped and dream for. But since Christ bears the stripes and wounds for you, through the cross of Christ, you can be confident that your present sufferings will one day be transformed into everlasting joy. (cf: Romans 8:18)

Amen.

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