

March 24, 2024
Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Philippians 2:5–11 (Zechariah 9:9–12; John 12:12–19)

HAVING THE MIND OF CHRIST.

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

Today marks the beginning the holiest week of the Church Year as we celebrate the culmination of Christ Jesus' work of salvation, entering His creation in the flesh of man, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, (cf: Matthew 5:17) going to Jerusalem, being glorified on Calvary's cross, and three days later, be raised from the dead. He has reconciled us to God through the blood of the cross. That's the heart of our faith. God the Son became a human creature so that He might repair our relationship with God the Father.

Everything went exactly according to the Father's plan and prophesy. Some 500 years prior to Jesus' Triumphal Entry into the holy city, God's prophet Zechariah foretold of the great and glorious day when the Messiah would enter Jerusalem saying:

***"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he..."***
(Zechariah 9:9)

Jesus' disciples shouldn't have been surprised. Three times He had told them that He was going to Jerusalem to be delivered over to the religious leaders who would condemn Him to death, deliver Him over to the Gentiles who would mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He would rise from the dead. (cf: Mark 8:31, 9:30–31, 10:32–33)

In the very same way that Solomon, son of King David, rode on a donkey to Jerusalem to be crowned king over Israel nearly a thousand years earlier, (cf: 1 Kings 1:38–40) Jesus rides into Jerusalem mounted on a colt, the foal of a donkey. But King Jesus is different from every other earthly king. He's one of a kind. He doesn't place His confidence in His military might and armor. His confidence is in God the Father in heaven. Riding into the holy city, He brings no violence, no anger or wrath... only kindness, justice, mercy, and salvation. As the incarnate Messiah rides into the city to receive His crown, the crowd:

***"... took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out,
'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of
Israel!'"*** (John 12:12–13)

The omniscient Son of God, rides humbly, knowing that in five short days these very same people would no longer be shouting "*Hosanna*" and "*Blessed is he...*" but would be jeering Him with taunts of:

"Crucify him, crucify him!" (John 19:6)

His people will not receive Him. (cf: John 1:11) They will reject God Himself as their King along with the peace and salvation that He offers. They will crown Him with a crown made of

thorns and nail Him onto His throne, the cross of His execution. And yet, knowing the suffering and bloody death He would face in Jerusalem, He still:

.... [rode] *on in majesty!*

In lowly pomp [rode] on to die. (LSB 441, stz. 5)

Yes, you and I cry out: ***“Ride on, ride on in majesty!”*** It’s a Palm Sunday confession of faith for all who trust and believe in Christ Jesus and His work of salvation on our behalf. The crowds in Jerusalem cried out ***“Hosanna,”*** which is: ***“... strictly, a cry expressing an appeal for divine help save! help, we pray!”*** (ANLEX, 416) But the crowds wanted earthly salvation from an earthly king.

You and I, however, live on the other side of that historic week. We know the tomb is empty. You and I know what it truly means for Jesus to accomplish our salvation... for Him to suffer God’s entire wrath against, and pay the wages of our sin, enduring the pain and agony while His very lifeblood poured from His sacred veins. Christ Jesus has reconciled us to God through the blood of the cross.

Yes, it seems like a strange way to save the world. But no matter how paradoxical or upside down it seems to human reason, God hides Himself in the humility of Christ. Victory comes through defeat and life comes from dying. In our epistle reading this morning, St. Paul beautifully describes this paradox. He begins by calling on us to have a mind:

“... which is yours in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2:5)

What is this mind? It’s having a mind and attitude toward others shaped by Jesus’ humble and self-giving sacrifice. It’s mind that’s humble, like the King of all creation riding into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. It’s a mind of perfect obedience that allowed Himself to be arrested, endure a phony trial, be tortured and killed – all according to the Father’s will. It’s a mind that loves you so much that He shed His own blood for your salvation. It’s a love that empties oneself to serve others.

Paul calls on us to have this mind – but instead – you and I have a self-centered and self-righteous mind. Because you believe that you’re morally superior to others, you’re quick to criticize and call out the sins of others. And since you’re so busy trying to dig the speck out of your brother’s eye, you don’t recognize the log in your own eye. (cf: Matthew 7:4–5) You prioritize your own feelings over and against your neighbor’s emotional hurting and suffering. The world sees acts of service and mercy as weakness and settling for less. You won’t risk serving others unless there’s something big in return for you. You’re not alone. I’m right there with you. It’s how the human sinful nature behaves. Even when you truly try to humble yourself and count others more significant than yourself, looking not to you own interests, but to the interests of others, you always come up empty. (cf: Philippians 2:3–4)

That wasn’t the case with Jesus. By emptying Himself, He not only didn’t come up empty, but it led to Him being exalted to the full. In catechism we talk about the two stages or states of Jesus’ work of salvation: His state of humiliation and His state of exaltation.

In His state of humiliation, Jesus didn’t always and fully use all His divine powers. St Paul says:

“... though [Jesus] was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (cf: Philippians 2:6–7)

He emptied Himself to become one of us, starting out as a tiny baby who needed to be spoon fed and have His diapers changed. It meant putting Himself in our place, under the Law. And ultimately it meant not using His divine powers to defend Himself – but humbling Himself to the Father’s will by silently suffering the most wretched and obscene deaths in the Greco-Roman world, crucifixion on a cross. (cf: Philippians 2:8)

But Jesus state of humiliation... His emptying Himself, didn’t leave Him empty. Because of it, God highly exalted Him in what we call is state of exaltation. Paul says:

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9–11)

Being highly exalted, Christ Jesus now and forevermore always and fully uses all His divine attributes. His exaltation is evidence of His victory over all His enemies – especially sin, death, and the grave. His exaltation reveals that He is different from every other earthly king. He’s a one of a kind King of the universe, and God the Father invites you and me and all mankind to confess and praise His name as the only Savior the world will ever know.

So, when St. Paul calls us to have a mind ***“... which is yours in Christ Jesus,”*** he’s not saying that Jesus is merely an example of how to empty yourself that you should follow. No. What he’s saying is – what Jesus did counts for you.

As sinful humans, you and I cannot empty ourselves of our selfishness and self-righteousness perfectly as we ought. So Jesus took the place of you and all sinful mankind under the Law to fulfill the Law for you. He humbled Himself even unto death on the cross to take your death so that you don’t have to suffer God’s wrath and pay the wages of your own sins. Your sin of believing you’re superior to others and criticism of others... your busy-ness of trying to dig out the speck from your brother’s eye while ignoring the log in your own eye... your lack of empathy and works of service and mercy toward others. Jesus won forgiveness for that – and you have His forgiveness in the ✠ Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Because you were united to Christ’s death and resurrection in Baptism, you fully share in Jesus’ exaltation. His name into which you were marked with in at the font, you’ll wear for all eternity. When you kneel before Him, you won’t be bowing in shame but in faith and joy. And with the angels, your tongue will sing His praise forever. And knowing that God will exalt you fully with Christ on the Last Day, you can joyfully serve and love others with a mind like Christ’s – just as God in Christ serves and loves you.

By emptying Himself unto death, Jesus fills you with abundant life. He gave His life so that you wouldn’t die – but live. He gave His blood to cover you with His righteousness. He came down from heaven in the form of a man to live a perfect life for you, and His atoning death takes your death from you. All this He did willingly and without complaint. All this He gladly suffered.

Amen.

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