

Passion Sunday
10 April, Anno Domini 2022
St. Matthew 26-27
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Today is a day of sharp contrasts as the Holy Christian Church descends into the darkness of Holy Week. And it is quite abrupt. We move straight from “Hosanna!” to “Crucify!” Palm branches to scourges. That is actually quite beautiful when you stop and think about it because the crucifixion of the Son of David is the answer to the cries of Hosanna that filled the air.

Now, we don't know exactly why the crowds were shouting Hosanna. Maybe they didn't fully either. Jesus had traveled into Jerusalem many times but not like this. This was different. Why this sudden joyous procession? Some people may have actually understood what was happening because they believed the Scriptures. Those who had been listening to Jesus' teaching for the last three years and witnessing the miracles saw by faith the long-expected Messiah. They may very well have seen Jesus riding that donkey, something King David had once done entering Jerusalem, the city of peace, and everything clicked. The words of Zechariah filled their minds “Behold your King comes to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” “It's finally time! The Son of David has come to His hour when He will triumph over sin and death. Ride on, Jesus. In lowly pomp ride on to die for us. This is your victory procession. Save us just as you promised our fathers long ago!” I'm sure others were expressing their desire for help for whatever was troubling them at the time - the death of a loved one, poverty, sickness, the oppressive rule of Rome. They certainly weren't wrong even though they didn't fully understand what they were asking for or what they needed. He came for those things too. Jesus receives all of their prayers and praises and continues steadily forward, passing over palm branches and cloaks to do as they ask - to help, to save.

How marvelous then that we should continue the procession with our own palm branches this morning and join the chorus of the whole Christian Church urging Jesus on to bring about our deliverance from God's wrath! That's why our congregation has everyone grab palm branches and process. This isn't about a re-enactment or something cute to involve the kids. This is

OUR Lord, OUR Savior, OUR Champion, on His way to die for all our sins, to save us and our children from eternal death, to take away the sting of the grave, to make peace between us and God, to give us hope in the midst of our afflictions and our own crosses. We have more cause for joy and celebration than anyone else in the world. Indeed, all joy springs from what happened outside the walls of Jerusalem that week. We know that our sorrows will come to an end and the sufferings we endured in this life will not even begin to compare with the joys that will be ours eternally. It is good to express this joy even in the midst of great hardship. The devil wants you to feel hopeless and alone and defeated. But you are none of those things. You are the redeemed of the Lord. And nothing drives the devil crazier than to see you actually find rest and peace in Christ - to laugh and remember that you are already victorious.

But even though our Lord has already accomplished our salvation, we still need that salvation brought to us, given to us. We are still poor, miserable sinners suffering the brokenness of this fallen world. We need saving. We need rescue. We need forgiveness. We need peace. And Christ lives, indeed! The iniquity of our sins has been atoned for. You are no longer a slave in Satan's Egypt. Instead, all who believe and are baptized are son's and daughters of the merciful Heavenly Father. We know for certain the love and care of our Father. But we do not yet enjoy the full fruits of salvation. We still endure pain. We still bury loved ones. We still lose jobs. Economies still crumble. Nation still rises up against nation. The world still hates the Church. We get angry. We covet. We yell at our children. We lie to our spouses. We grumble about our fellow Christians behind their backs and tear the church apart rather than speak with them face-to-face in love for the building up of all. We resist those in authority over us. Some of our brothers and sisters in the faith cower as tanks and missiles shell their neighborhood. Others worship in secret wondering when the police are going to discover them and either jail them or martyr them for being Christians. Hosanna, indeed! Save us, Lord! We cry out not only for our own personal needs but for the needs of the Church and even the unbelieving world. We wave our palm branches and call upon the Son of David to come and stand in our midst and give us the peace of His Passion.

And in great mercy, the Lord Jesus hears your cries! He comes with healing in His wings. He comes to bring us the fruit of Holy Week - the peace of His pierced hands and feet, the comforting balm of the Holy Absolution and the Body and Blood that hung on the cross making atonement for sin and

undoing the curse of death. He brings the cross and the sacrifice to you. Just as surely as He came to Jerusalem to be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, to be crucified, and to be raised from the dead He has come to you today, to this Jerusalem, this city of peace, to bestow upon you, His beloved people, salvation, to answer your Hosannas.

The processions that we will begin to have at the beginning of each Divine Service starting at Easter are wonderful reminders of that very truth. You don't worship an absent God who keeps Himself at a safe distance from you. He is not far off. He does not bid us to ascend to Him in heart, mind, or body. No. He humbles Himself and descends to us. He comes to help and deliver us. Our God comes to be with and among us, not to die again but to bring to us EVERY benefit of His death and resurrection. We aren't putting on a play. We gather here every Lord's Day in the true presence of our resurrected King that He may bless us and speak to us the Words of life. He comes to us that He may teach us truth and strengthen us. He grants us His Holy Spirit so that we may be able to endure our own procession through this sinful world until we arrive at the heavenly Jerusalem. There we will stand in the unveiled presence of our God no longer crying out for help and salvation but raising unending songs of triumph because our warfare will finally and forever be over. No more temptations to sin. No more wars. No more health crises. No more debts. No more death. Only those who have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb lifting up palm branches and hymns of praise with angels and archangels and the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church to the Son of David who stands in our midst.

Dear people of God, let your Hosannas ring out right alongside your joyful confession "Blessed is He that has come to us today in the Name of the Lord bringing forgiveness, life, and salvation in His wings!" May the Lord richly bless our meditation this week upon His immeasurable mercy and the gift of His Passion so that our Alleluias may ring out with unparalleled joy and exuberance on Easter as we stand in the presence of our God and Savior.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.