

“The King of Peace” | Psalm 31:9-19; John 12:12-19 | Palm Sunday
Pastor Nick Shults | St. Mark Lutheran Church | Sunnyvale, CA

Focus: Despite the death sentence, Jesus rides into Jerusalem to complete his mission as the King of Peace

Function: That my hearers would humble themselves as they follow Jesus into Jerusalem.

It all started with a dead man.

Well, it all started with a man who *used* to be dead.

No, I’m not talking about Jesus. I’m talking about *Lazarus*.

The events leading up to our Gospel reading for this morning are important for helping us to understand many of the details and significance of the events that took place on that first Palm Sunday.

It was perhaps a few weeks earlier when Jesus heard the news that his friend Lazarus had fallen ill and was dead. Curiously enough, Jesus doesn’t make a B-line to Bethany right away but rather hangs back for a few days. Mary and Martha, Lazarus’ sisters didn’t understand but, if you know the story, you know that Jesus had a plan. His plan was focused not on Mary and Martha or even Lazarus but on the glory of God. So when Jesus finally shows up on the scene, four days after Lazarus had been placed in the tomb, he asks for the stone to be rolled away.

Whoa Whoa whoa, Martha cries out. I don’t think you want to do *that!* But indeed, after the stone is rolled away Jesus calls out to Lazarus and, John writes, “The man who had died came out...”.

Those who had seen this incredible sign placed their trust in Jesus...John says they believed in him. But there were some who were less enthusiastic about the attention that Jesus had drawn to himself.

Like I said, it all started with a dead man.

Of course, there had, for much of his public ministry, been significant opposition to Jesus. There were even a few attempts to put him to death for the claims that he was making. But when the religious leaders, namely the Pharisees, saw the following Jesus was gathering they began to fear the consequences. Should this Jesus gather enough support he might start to rise up and begin an insurrection...an insurrection that, no doubt, would be crushed by the Romans. Not only would the uprising be defeated, but their temple and their nation...their entire identity...would be destroyed as well.

“So from that day on”, John reports, “they made plans to put him to death”. Indeed, they issued an arrest warrant for Jesus...that if anyone knew where he was, they should report it to the Pharisees in order that Jesus should be arrested.

It was now time for the Passover and Jerusalem, which normally was a city of about 50,000 swelled to probably 250,000 people. Pilgrims from all over coming to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. The big question, though, was this: “Is Jesus even going to show up?” Will Jesus, knowing his life was on the line, show up in Jerusalem during the feast and perhaps lead the rebellion the people and the Pharisees were expecting? As the pilgrims milled around the temple, this was the question they pondered together.

But what about Jesus? Certainly he knew that he was a wanted man for John tells us in John 11 that Jesus could no longer go out in public so he withdrew to a private place. Our psalm for this morning no doubt captures the mood of Jesus.

READ verses 9-13

To his adversaries, Jesus had become a reproach. They schemed and plotted against him, desiring nothing more to shut him up by taking his life.

But the psalm continues...

READ verses 14-19

Jesus isn't deterred by the plotting of those who stood against him. He was not scared off by those who wanted to silence him. As we saw last week, Jesus knew what going into Jerusalem meant for him. But he goes because he has the mission of his Father to complete. He knows that going into Jerusalem would mean death for *him* but redemption and restoration for the entire world.

And so we pick up with our Gospel reading for today. Jesus, knowing the plotting and scheming of his enemies, places his trust in the heavenly father and he continues on his journey. And he arrives to what might be considered a hero's welcome!

He's greeted by the crowds of people who had heard about the raising of Lazarus and they come out, waving palm branches, something that had become a *national symbol* for the Jews. Greeting Jesus with these palm branches signaled their *hope* in him. But not hope in him for the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life but a *nationalist* hope. A Hope that desired freedom from their Roman overlords...a hope that expected an armed rebellion against their occupiers.

No doubt, then, did they expect this Jesus, the one they hoped to be their messianic liberator, to come riding into Jerusalem on some war horse. On a big, powerful stallion or maybe even in a chariot. *That* would have signaled to the people and those in power that Jesus had come for a *fight*. That he had come to lead his people against the powers in Rome.

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But that's not what Jesus does, is it?

To the cries of "Hosanna!" which means "save now" or "give salvation now"

And 'blessed is he who comes in the name of the lord' a citation from psalm 118 that expressed their hope in a king like their king David, to these cries Jesus comes riding in on a...donkey? A small, weak, goofy looking *donkey*? Yes, a donkey. A donkey that fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah that, indeed, their king would come riding in, but not on a war horse.

He would come instead in peace, gentle and riding on a donkey.

This man who the people thought would come to bring uprising....comes instead to bring the end of war. He comes to proclaim peace to the nations. He comes not to take up his throne in a palace. No, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey to take up his rightful throne *on the cross*.

You see, as Jesus' disciple were taking in what would have been an incredibly bizarre scene, the crowds cheering and chanting, waving their palm branches as Jesus rides in on this dinky little donkey, it just didn't compute. The crowds were expecting a savior to liberate them from Rome. They were expecting power and might. But what they got was Jesus.

Humble. Gentle. Peaceful.

And it wasn't until Jesus was glorified that it clicked for the disciples.

Yes, the people were getting their savior. Yes, the people were finally receiving their king like David. Yes, the people were finally getting their freedom. But in a way that no one ever expected. All of this would come when Jesus was lifted up...on the cross. We heard Jesus say a couple weeks ago in our Gospel reading, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life"

For Jesus glorification, being 'lifted up' = crucifixion. Crucifixion = glorification. When Jesus is executed...right there on the cross, he is glorified *and* God the Father, through him, is glorified too. On the cross Jesus takes his place on His throne as the King of Peace.

You might think...hmmm...that's a little counterintuitive that an instrument of torture and death is said to be the place where Jesus is glorified. And it certainly is! But why can we say that Jesus reigns as King...from the cross?

Why can we say that? Because it's there on the cross that we see the height and depth, and width of God's incredible love for us. It's there that Jesus the King of Peace takes upon himself all of God's wrath, judgment, and punishment we actually deserve.

If we look at everything going on around us and at our own lives, the lack of peace without and within makes it evident that something just isn't right. Sin reigns all around us.

But God's response to this isn't to let it take over. It's not to give up on us. It's to make *peace* with us. It's to restore our relationship with him. It's to show His overwhelming love to us. We get our king, we get our peace, we get our salvation because God graciously gives it to us through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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The redemption and restoration of the entire world, that's what God has set out to achieve, it requires nothing more on our part. It's a gift given to us because God loves us. Because God wants to bring us back to himself. And it's a gift given to us on the cross.

As Jesus is crowned with thorns and nailed to his throne. What looks like his shame. A dreadful death, where he is exposed and vulnerable, jeered by passers by. What looks so shameful and tragic...well, it turns out to be for his glory and for our good.

Because through what appears to be a shameful death, peace is achieved. Peace comes because our sin and the brokenness of all creation is nailed to that cross with him. Peace comes not because Jesus rode into Jerusalem on this day to make war. But because he rode into Jerusalem on this knowing that by his death peace would indeed be achieved. Not through violence, not through uprising. But through the loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our King of peace. Amen.