

Theme: *The Actions of Christ's Passion* – “Exalted”

Text: John 12:12-19

12 The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13 took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!" 14 Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: 15 "Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt." 16 His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and *that* they had done these things to Him. 17 Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. 18 For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. 19 The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!"

In the name of our triumphant Savior-King, dear fellow Redeemed,

It was a few days before Palm Sunday in 2003 that an army made up of U.S. and Coalition forces took the Iraqi capital city of Baghdad. Do you remember seeing that footage on TV? Our troops triumphantly entered the city sitting on powerful tanks waving the American flag. People were dancing and cheering in the streets, toppling the statue of Saddam Hussein. This was the scene of a triumphant army liberating the people of Iraq from an oppressive dictator. The people were rejoicing that the Coalition forces had come into their city to bring them freedom.

That triumphant entry of our soldiers and tanks into Baghdad was a lot like our Savior's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday...well, sort of. Jesus did enter Jerusalem much like many of the conquering emperors and kings of His day. People would line the streets of the city and shout their praises. They would "roll out the red carpet" for their king by laying their clothes and palm branches on the ground in front of him. There is no doubt that on Palm Sunday Jesus was **exalted** by the people of Jerusalem.

However, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was unlike any other conqueror's entry into a city. Think about the strange words of the hymn we just sang, "Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp..." "Lowly pomp?" That sounds like an oxymoron, doesn't it? But isn't that a perfect description of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? "Lowly pomp."

Jesus didn't come riding on a massive tank like our U.S. army soldiers. He didn't ride in on a powerful white steed with an army close behind like many kings and emperors of His day. Instead Jesus came on a lowly donkey—and not just a donkey Luke's gospel tells us that it was a colt, a young donkey that had never been ridden. Picture Jesus, a grown man, riding into the city on this little donkey. It's not exactly the most powerful and majestic image, is it? And yet we read that all the people lined up to praise and welcome Him as royalty. They laid down palm branches and spread their clothes out on the road and shouted, "**Hosanna! 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!**" (v. 13).

What is going on here? On the one hand you have Jesus riding on a donkey in lowliness and humility, but on the other hand you have all the people **exalting** Him as their king. What kind of King is this? What kind of King is Jesus?

For the answer to this question we look to the Old Testament prophecy that John tells us was fulfilled by Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. It is the same prophecy we read in our responsive reading from **Zechariah: "Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9)**. Jesus did not come into Jerusalem as a warlord to conquer lands and nations and establish an earthly kingdom. He came for a much greater purpose than that. He came to die! He came to bring salvation to all mankind, for all time through His death. Now, He did come to conquer and establish His kingdom: He came to conquer sin by His death and to conquer death by His resurrection. His work of salvation established His eternal spiritual kingdom in the hearts of His believers. A kingdom of eternal peace with God through the forgiveness of sins, which His death won for us. Jesus is more than a king. He is our Savior!

One other question that we might ask when we consider the events of Palm Sunday is: How did things change so quickly? How did Jesus go from the height of popularity on Palm Sunday to the depths of a condemned criminal on Good Friday. In just five short days the people of Jerusalem changed their tune from songs of **"Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (v. 13)** to shouts of **"Crucify Him!"** Jesus was so popular on this day that even his enemies, the Pharisees admitted, **"Look, the world has gone after Him!" (v. 19)**. And yet on Good Friday, even His closest disciples deserted Him.

Well, for one thing we don't know for sure if the people that gathered to praise Jesus in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday were the same people who were gathered on Good Friday calling for His crucifixion. However, it is interesting to note the reason our text gives as to why many of these people came to see Jesus, **"Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign" (v. 17-18)**. These people had either witnessed Jesus raise Lazarus, a man who had been dead for four days, or had heard about this miracle.

Could it be that many of these people had come to see a great miracle worker? Someone who could heal all their sicknesses, feed the hungry, raise the dead, and even overthrow the hated Roman government and re-establish the kingdom of Israel. Many of the Jews were looking for this type of Messiah. An earthly king who would restore Israel to the glory days of King David's rule. When Jesus let Himself be captured, humiliated, and crucified on that disgraceful cross perhaps many of these same people became disillusioned with who Jesus really was—who the Messiah really was—and turned their backs on Him in unbelief.

Before we cluck our tongues at these people and say "Shame on you!" Let's ask ourselves: "Why have I come this Palm Sunday morning to see Jesus, my King?" Have we come to see a king whom we expect to take care of all our earthly desires as we see fit? Do we see Jesus *only* as a miracle worker whom we hope will heal us of our physical illnesses and take care of our material needs? Or have we come to meet and worship our humble yet exalted Savior-King who has taken care of our greatest *spiritual* need: sin?

It is so easy for us to criticize the people of Jerusalem for turning on Jesus so quickly, but haven't we found ourselves doing the same thing many times. It is so easy for us to sing our **"Hosannas!"** to Jesus and joyfully call Him our king when we are healthy and content, when the weather's nice, when we are happy, when we are with friends and family, or when we are here joining in worshipping our Savior-King with our fellow believers at church. But how quickly we turn on Jesus! How quickly do our **"Hosannas!"** turn to curses when Jesus does not take care of our problems and sicknesses as quickly or in the way we think He should; or when we are lonely and depressed. How quickly we turn on Jesus when one minute we are singing our **"Hosannas!"** to Him in church and the next minute we are arguing with our family members, complaining about our lot in life, or thinking and speaking evil of that person that we don't like all that much. We turn on Jesus when we commit these very sins that nailed Him to the cross!

Praise Jesus, our humble Savior-King, that He came to Jerusalem to take the nails of that cross for us! By His death we are forgiven all of our sins—even for the times our “**Hosannas**” have turned into complaints and curses. By His resurrection we are made victorious over death and assured of everlasting life in Jesus’ kingdom of heaven! For all this Jesus, our Savior-King, deserves our “**Hosannas!**” He deserves to be **exalted**. May the Holy Spirit move all of us to do exactly that on this Palm Sunday—and always! Amen.