

*Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)*

*Palm Sunday – Palmarum*

*March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021*

*Gospel – John 12:16 (Hindsight Is Always 20/20)*

*By Pastor Hromowyk*

✠ ✠

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. We hear these words from the Gospel again, John 12:16, “[Jesus’] disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.” So far the Word of the Lord.

You know the phrase hindsight is 20/20. We have all experienced it in one way or another. We have a clearer view of things after we go through them, especially in the case of hardships and difficult times. It is a lot easier to state an observation summary of a flood after the waters recede than when you’re struggling to keep yourself afloat in the midst of it! **In Psalm 69 David cries out, “Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck” (v. 1)!** Because David’s sufferings were so great in the midst of attacks imposed by his enemies, all he could do was cry out to God for help! Yet in other Psalms, David is able to look back on his sufferings and see how great the Lord’s help was. In Psalm 23 he confesses that the Lord, “makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me besides still waters. He restores my soul.” Thus we see even today that the Christian life in prayer is one of thanksgiving and supplication! Petitions to God for deliverance for attacks on both body and soul, and thankfulness to the Lord for delivering us from such trials and tribulations.

And that’s one aspect of the Psalm Sunday story isn’t it? Like David, the crowds shouted, “Save us, O Lord!” which is what the word Hosanna means! They petitioned the Lord to save them, and they praised Him with their thanksgivings acknowledging, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” And yet, the depth of their confession on that first Palm Sunday could not have been fully grasped until after the Lord was glorified.

Our disciples didn’t understand everything at first that took place, as our Gospel text from John 12 clearly stated (v. 16). It wasn’t until the “storm had passed” as it were, and Jesus was glorified having risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, that they gained such hindsight by the work of the Holy Spirit. We can sympathize with such a thing knowing that we, too, would have had the same near-sighted reaction to most things Jesus said or did in His earthly sojourn as the disciples did. We struggle with near-sightedness as it is now, and we know how the whole salvation story shook out!

But what may be overlooked is that while the text says the *disciples* did not understand these things at first, the crowds totally *seemed* to understand what was going on. Maybe you and I tragically don’t know our Bibles as well as we should, but the crowds sure did. What they cried out were no random words. “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” They were singing the words of Psalm 118!

Psalm 118 is one of the six great *Hallel* psalms. *Hallel* is the Hebrew word for praise – it’s where we get the word Hallelujah from that we have been omitting from our liturgy and hymns during the season of Lent. These six Psalms were sung before and after the celebration of the Passover. Psalm 118 specifically was sung *after* the Passover. It was also a processional Psalm. Not only had Jesus not instituted the new Passover yet – that would take place 4 days later, which is what we will be celebrating this Maundy Thursday – but also the Jewish Passover was still a week away!

Hindsight may be 20/20, but I think the vision of the crowds on that first Palm Sunday was clearer than we give them credit for. Certainly their understanding wouldn’t have its fullness until after Jesus’ death and resurrection, but they knew by faith who this Jesus was. This crowd had been with Jesus when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, and they continued to bear witness (Jn 12:17). It’s why they “went to meet him” (v. 18) in the first place on those Jerusalem streets!

Listen to some of the other verses in Psalm 118 that we today have the hindsight to see how they would be fulfilled in Christ. Even though the crowds may not have known the “how”, they certainly by faith would have trusted that Jesus was the fulfillment of this Processional Psalm as He processed into Jerusalem for the last time. **V. 9, “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.”** Jesus was no earthly prince, but the

King of Creation. **V. 14, “The LORD is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation”**, which is quoted from the victory song at the Red Sea after Pharaoh and his hosts were drowned there (Ex 15:2a). So in Christ, our sins are drowned and die in Baptism, and through daily contrition and faith. **V. 17, “I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.”** This is still the confession we make and will do so most especially one week from today! As Christ lives, so, too, shall we! **Vv. 22-24**, which perhaps are the most fitting verses of Psalm 118 in light of what’s coming here in Holy Week that really demonstrate how Christ alone fulfills this Psalm; **“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”** The Christ would be rejected by the very people that built the temple. But, alas, the rejected piece is the most important piece, upon which the Church firmly stands! Jesus Christ, the rock of our salvation! And yet we don’t mourn that the Christ would be rejected, for such was the will of God. It’s marvelous in our eyes, and we rejoice in it!

You already know most of the rest of the Psalm. *“Hosanna – Save us, we pray, O Lord!... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The LORD is God, and He has made His light to shine upon us.... Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever”* (vv. 25a, 26a, 27, 29). That love is still enduring as the Lord still comes to us in great procession. Though humble and foolish in the eyes of the world, Jesus comes to us in His body and blood under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins. The Light of the world is still shining upon us in Word and Sacrament, verbalized most clearly in the Benediction: *“The LORD makes His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.”*

Hindsight sees all the events of Palm Sunday fulfilled in Christ crucified and risen from the dead. And yet there are things that we will still not fully understand until the Last Day. All God’s promises are the Lord’s doing, and they are marvelous in our eyes. We know how the final story ends – we know all who repent and believe in Jesus receive forgiveness and will inherit eternal life. But we don’t truly or fully know just how great and marvelous that fulfillment will be. We just have to wait patiently and see! **Psalm 37:7, “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.”** That’s hard to do. We want vindication now. We want the world to stop its nonsense now! We want the Lord to take vengeance on the evil doer now! **1 Corinthians 1:7-8, “You are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** By faith we confess that this end will be far greater than anything we can fathom. True faith trusts God’s Word to be true, just as the crowds trusted the words of Psalm 118 that they cried out two thousand years ago!

This past week one of our beloved shut-ins, Ruth Wagner, was in the hospital. When I called her on Friday she just kept saying over and over again in a heart wrenching tone, “I just want to go home.” I knew she meant her home on Innis Drive, but in hindsight when this life shall pass, no doubt we will look back on such urgent desires and see how they are truly fulfilled only in heaven when our Hosannas – Lord save us – are truly fulfilled. In heaven the Christian will finally be home at last. In paradise, there will be no more longing for fleeting earthly comforts.

Palm Sunday is a reminder that we have a glimpse of paradise here on earth. For as we sing the *Sanctus* before the reception of the Lord’s Supper, we are reminded that heaven comes to us. Jesus comes to us and saves us, He “Hosanna”s us as it were, for in His body and blood He gives the forgiveness of sins. Since He is truly present, we share in the confession of the crowds on that first Palm Sunday, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Faith believes this the same way faith believes all God’s promises – by faith.

In hindsight even now we look back on all the events of this past year and see how God has increased our faith through the reception of the Word and Sacraments. The only person who can deny that truth is the person who denied God’s promises by not receiving them. Thanks be to God that He is patient. **2 Peter 3:15, “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation.”** Repent and believe the Good News. As Jesus came to Jerusalem for you, so also Jesus comes today for you! And every time He comes, He does so having borne our sins, and freely forgiving them! In Jesus’ name, Amen!