

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!

Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!

*See, your king comes to you,
righteous and having salvation,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

¹⁰ *I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the war-horses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken.*

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10)

Why Should We Rejoice Today?

A couple of years ago, my tax guy handed me the forms to sign. I guess I looked a little too eager when I flipped through them to see how it all came out, so he said, “There’s no good news here.” Not only did I not have a return coming, I owed the government money. A lot of people look forward to getting their tax return. But for us that year, that hope was a kind of a cheat. Does Palm Sunday ever feel like a cheat to you? We get celebrate because the people of Jerusalem celebrated. We echo their hosannas and sometimes, even wave palm branches. We have the kids sing just like the people sang that day. We wish that we could get as excited about Jesus they were. I mean, spontaneously, they just started marching with him and shouting his praises as he came into Jerusalem. But it only lasted a couple of days. By Friday, the same crowds were shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” So why should we get excited Palm Sunday? **Why should we rejoice today?**

I.

Because our King comes to us! That’s what was happening that day. Matthew quotes our Old Testament lesson for today to tell us that truth. Even though winning his kingdom was going to mean dying, it was our King who came into his own city that day.

Now, for any people other than the Jews, it would’ve been hard to see Jesus as a real king that day. For thousands of years all of the world, part of being a king was showing it. You had to wear the most expensive clothes and ride the best horses and your soldiers and servants had to be decked out in a way that made other people jealous. Jesus couldn’t have been farther from that ideal. He didn’t have any expensive clothes to wear. He didn’t ride a stallion or have soldiers march with him. He didn’t have all the great nobles following him, dressed in their best. On that first Palm Sunday, a very different kind of parade took place. Jesus did make preparations. He sent two of his disciples ahead of him to bring him a donkey’s colt – the kind of animal a poor farmer rode. Instead of saddle, his disciples threw their cloaks over the donkey’s back. Then they led him into the city. Because it was less than a week until the Passover, Jerusalem was filled with people coming to celebrate. As they saw Jesus approach, they burst into song. They started cutting palm branches and waving them and spreading them in front of the colt. They threw their cloaks on the ground for Jesus to ride over. And they shouted “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

But by the standards of kingship for most of human history, there was nothing about this procession that looked like a king coming home. Yet that’s exactly what they claimed about Jesus. Why? Because of this prophecy from Zechariah. God told his people to look for something different when their true king came. He said, “**See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**” How would they recognize the true King of Israel when he finally came? He would ride on a donkey. He would forget all the human trappings of kingship, all the things that we use to desperately try to convince people that this person really is somebody important. Instead, he would be righteous. He would have salvation. He would be gentle and humble and worthy of all the praise and honor that saints and angels can sing to him for all eternity.

That's what God promised them. For a thousand years, ever since the time of King David, God had been promising them that their true king would come. Of course, over the centuries countless people must have ridden into Jerusalem on donkeys, but only this one was the King. God moved his people on Palm Sunday to recognize him. It was a miracle of the gospel that they rejoiced that day. But why should we? Why should we still be celebrating this entrance two thousand years later? Because our true King came into Jerusalem that day, too. Jesus didn't just come for Israel. He came for the whole world. He knew that when he entered Jerusalem. In fact, he knew how many of the people who were cheering and shouting that day would want his blood later that week, but he still came in to die for them. And he came for us. We mean that much to him. He came to win the whole world that day.

Win it, he did. When he laid down his life on Friday and then rose again on Sunday, he broke down the gates of hell and led us out of the devil's kingdom into his own. Through the message of what he did for us, he enters into human hearts and minds and makes us a part of that kingdom. Even though not everyone is going to believe it, Jesus did do that for every person who will ever live. There is not one slave of sin that he didn't ride into Jerusalem to save. So there is no reason for us to ever doubt his love. There is no reason for us ever to question whether we are included.

Don't we fall into that kind of doubt all too easily? Let's be honest, when we feel guilty, don't we doubt, on some level, that Jesus really did that for us? The truth is, Jesus freed us from more than guilty feelings. He freed us from death and hell. He rescued us from slavery in the devil's kingdom. The devil lost. But he's still fighting a guerrilla war. The devil knows that on Judgement Day, Jesus is going to send him down into the deepest, darkest part of hell to suffer forever. The only thing Satan can do is drag people down there with him. So he whispers in our ear. He reminds us of things that we've done and said. Have you ever been riding along in your car and your mind just turned to something you did a long time ago and you felt guilty? Are there just certain things that remind you of your bad behavior in the past? Are there certain people you can't think of without remembering how badly you treated them? The devil wants you to feel guilty. He wants you to wallow in how stupid and uncaring and mean you were. He wants you to feel the hurt you've caused and to ache over it. Because he wants you to think that you could never be forgiven.

But Jesus rode into Jerusalem to win for you. He won by losing. He let himself be arrested and mocked and convicted, even though he could've stopped the whole thing any time he wanted to. He let himself be nailed to a cross. There on that cross, he let his Father in heaven pour all the hell that every sinner who ever lived deserves. Then he gave up his spirit and died. Jesus did that for you and for me and for all people who will ever live. He paid what we owed. Then Jesus rose. He broke open the gates of hell and the doors of death and he walked out. He carried you and me with him. Our sin is gone. Our death has died. We are free from the devil and we belong to the real King, to Jesus, forever.

When he came to us in baptism, he taught us to believe that. When we come here, when we go to communion, when we hear the good news of his love, Jesus works in our hearts to anchor our faith to him. He silences the devil with the promises of life and forgiveness. You are forgiven. You are his. Rejoice today, because that's what your King came to do for you.

II.

That why we celebrate this festival year after year. Our king came in and he won eternal life for us. But you know what? In this world, winning the peace is often almost as hard as winning the war. How do you make the most of victory? How do you avoid frittering it away? It's a tough thing to do. Soldiers and private citizens have to figure out how to live in the new world. In democracies like ours, lots of times, presidents and prime ministers that everybody loved during the war get booted out of office when peace comes. But in our great King, we have the only leader who can never fail. He won the war and now he teaches us how to win the peace. Today is about that, too. **Why should we rejoice today? Because our king brings peace to us!**

Zechariah pictured that peace for us. God said that he would take away the warhorses and the chariots from Israel and break their battle bows. If God had sent Zechariah in our time, he might've spoken about taking away tanks and fighter planes and breaking M-16's. God's people don't need the equipment of war anymore, because Christ brings true peace.

What does peace mean? When I ask my catechism class that question, almost always they talk about their feelings. Peace certainly can mean calmness in our hearts. But that's not the first meaning. Peace is the opposite of war. Every political leader promises peace, even when they're fighting wars, because everyone

wants wars to end. So the greatest of all kings, the King of the Universe, promises us peace when he comes, too. He does mean the end of war. But not on this earth – at least not right away. Jesus himself said that he did not come to bring peace in that sense, but a sword. He said that wars will continue until he comes back. So what is the peace he brings now? Jesus brings the end of our war with God. You see, every sinner is born God's enemy. We belonged to the devil who's been waging war against God since the Garden of Eden. But Jesus came to win us for his kingdom. When he gave us our faith in Christ, he moved from the devil's side to God's side. He made us God's allies. He ended a war that we could only lose.

With that peace comes peace in our hearts. The peace of knowing that God loves us, the peace of knowing that our sin is gone and it will not drag us down to hell, the peace of knowing that we will spend eternity with Jesus. We will see that day when world peace really does come – when Jesus returns. The true King is going to bring an end to all war and all strife and all conflict. He is going to give us a perfect world where we will live in peace and safety forever. Today, in the midst of all the strife of life in this world, that promise does bring peace to our hearts.

Jesus conquered in Jerusalem so that all warfare will finally cease. He conquered in our hearts so that we can be a part of that peace. So when he rode into Jerusalem with all the crowds shouting and waving their palm branches, he was really giving us a glimpse of Judgment Day when all creation will shout, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" On that day, we will march with our Savior into eternal life. That's really what our Hosannas and our hymns remind us of today.

So how do we win the peace now? How do we avoid frittering away all that Jesus has given us? By living for him. Every day that we live here, we're tempted to let the cares and the worries of this life wash away the peace that Jesus gives us. Every time we sin, we disturb that peace. Every time we watch the news and see reports about nerve gas in Syria and gridlock in congress and unchristian agendas sweeping our country, the devil wants us to forget the victory Jesus won. So every day, we need to come back to Jesus. We need to remember his promises. We need read his Word and come to church and take communion. We need to make the gospel the center of our family life.

And we need to join together in spreading the gospel. God gave us this congregation to be a place where peace is found and shared. The founders of our congregation treasured the peace that Jesus won so much that they named our church after it. As long as we are in this world, we need the peace we find here. And we need to share that peace. That's why we're still here. We all could just go home to heaven today. We could just relax in the eternal peace of Christ. But God hasn't called us home yet because we still have work to do here.

That work is a joy. That peace is a joy. That King who won it all is ours. He knows you personally. He loves you and gives you the ability to share and serve. He is with you, every day, guiding you home. That King laid down his life at the end of the first Holy Week so that you and I will live with him forever. So, all the cheering of that first Palm Sunday wasn't a cheat, even if most of those people eventually cried for Jesus' blood. The King was real. The peace was real. The victory was real. And it is yours. And mine. Forever. Amen.