

## What Kind Of King Is This?

John 12:12-18

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

March 20, 2016 – Palm Sunday



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Entering into Jerusalem for the last Passover of the Old Covenant, Jesus had come as King – a humble King – a victorious King – a peaceful King – a beggar King riding on a donkey belonging to another. All week long the town had been in an uproar with rumors and questions as to whether this Jesus would show at all. One could hardly have blamed Him for staying in Galilee where there were no threats against His life – where He was in no immediate danger of being arrested. But the day before, He'd been spotted in Bethany eating the Sabbath meal with His friends – with Martha and her sister Mary, who had anointed His head and feet with costly ointment in preparation for His death – and with Lazarus whom He'd raised from the dead. Little did anyone realize, but *on this day* no one could have kept Jesus away. The Son of God had a date with destiny on a cross of wood, and He was determined – for the sake of this world of sinners – to keep it.

Once the word got out that Jesus was in town, neither was there any way the crowds could be held back. The lookie-loos were out in full force. And even though our Lord knew full-well what was going on, He didn't try to sneak into town, rather He made His entrance openly and publicly. According to a prophecy of Scripture He had His disciples borrow a donkey, and sitting atop its back, He rode into Jerusalem as King. The people lined up along the roadside, formed a welcoming procession, waved palms in the air, and chanted the words of the 118<sup>th</sup> Psalm: "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!"

The stage had been set. The Week we now call Holy had finally begun. The Messiah-King was coming into His city – and His city was welcoming Him. In fact, they'd been awaiting this day for nearly 500 years – ever since Zechariah wrote: "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King is coming to you, righteous and having salvation – gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The plans for this day were imbedded, if you will, both in Israel's history and in the reflexes of God's people – very much like we might salute the flag or bow to the cross in our own day. The people knew the prophesy by heart. They even knew the flow of the lit-

urgy they were going to use in welcoming this King with palm branches and hosannas.

And so the Lord of heaven and earth continued His ride toward destiny – but not in the way you might expect. After all, the kings of this world are supposed to ride around in chauffeur-driven splendor – yet here we find *this* King riding around in a borrowed Buick, if you will. The One who had no place to lay His head, also had no valiant steed to carry Him into His battle with death – no beast to bear Him before His subjects with dignity and honor. The One who was rich had become poor for our sakes – so that through His poverty we might become rich in the kingdom of God. It's not the kind of profile most would expect from One who's so great, but then greatness in God's kingdom has never been defined in terms of surplus or power, but rather poverty and humility. Jesus is the King of the least, the lost, and the lowly – the beggar-King who rules over a kingdom of poor, wretched beggars.

But in spite of His appearance, He is still a King nonetheless – even as the palm branches attest. You see, in the culture of Jesus' day, palm branches were like ticker-tape, confetti, and fireworks. They were reserved solely for kings coming home from battle – victorious over their enemies. The waving of palm branches was a symbol that the good guys had won. But wait a minute! Doesn't the celebration seem a bit premature for this King? After all the battle had yet be fought. The cross still lay at the end of the road, and the victory party wasn't supposed to take place for another week. And yet, here was Jesus being hailed as the conquering Hero and the Victor King. Who else but the Lord would dare celebrate victory a week early?

But isn't that also the way it for those who have faith in this King? You and I can celebrate the outcome of this battle even before it draws to a close because we already know God has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Though you and I face uncertainty and death every day as we draw closer to our own last breath and to the world's final gasp – in spite of the fact that every sunrise brings with it another set of problems, challenges, disasters, and disappointments – and even though every time we get out of bed we're aware of the very real possibility that we might be tempted once again to doubt the victory of Christ over death – to

live as if Jesus had never risen from the dead – and to live in denial of His work in our lives? Yet in the foolishness of our faith, God has caused us to rejoice and shake our fists in the very face of death because we already know how it ends! We already know that Jesus will be – and has been victorious – because that’s the promise of God’s Word, which cannot lie.

And God’s Word teaches us that the victory ends with the coming of Jesus – this One who once was slain but now lives forevermore – with *our* rising from the dead in the power of *His* resurrection – and with eternal life for *all* who have placed their trust in Him. So today we also wave our palm branches in the blessed assurance that through Baptism Jesus’ death has become our death – His life, our life – and His strength, our strength. Through the power of His Holy Spirit working in the Word, we know and believe that no matter what happens, God has given us eternal life in Christ’s name, and that nothing, *nothing* can ever hurt or harm us again. All this we know because the victory belongs to Jesus. And *that’s* the sermon these palm branches preach. They’re saying to us and to the world: Here is a King you can count on even when all other would-be kings are failing and falling on their faces. Here, on *this* donkey, is the One who healed the sick, cast out demons, made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the mute to speak, and the dead to rise from the grave. Here is the One who once hung dead on a cross *for you* so that you might live under Him in His kingdom in righteousness and blessedness forever.

And then, there are the Hosannas. While the palm branches bespeak Jesus’ Kingship, the Hosannas proclaim the work He came to accomplish in the lives of His people. Hosanna is a Hebrew word – a word, which, interesting enough, has come into our language completely unfettered by the weakness translation often causes. Quite simply this Hebrew word means “Lord, save us.” Even as one drowning might cry out: “Save me!” – and the person whose life is in desperate danger might dial 911 – so we also now shout “Hosanna!” – crying out to the Lord that He might save us – and He does! He saves us from our sin by becoming sin for us. He saves us from death and hell by dying for us in our place. And He saves us from the devil by doing battle with him – by facing him head on and unafraid.

Hosanna is the hymn of praise God’s people are to shout from their rooftops, sing in their Churches, and

plant in the deepest recesses of their souls. “Save us, Lord. Save us from the sin that often weighs us down and causes us to doubt Your love. Save us from that death which dogs us to the grave, causes us to fear, and to wonder at times about Your victory and goodness. Save us from the devil who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking to devour us. Save us most of all from our selves and from our sins – because left to our own devices, we would be lost forever.” Hosanna is the prayer of the penitent, the cry of the one who has nothing of his own, whose hands are empty, whose heart is crushed, and whose spirit is broken. And as our King hears our Palm Sunday hosannas, He turns them into Easter alleluias, taking them with Him to the cross and nailing them there with His own body.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Sing out exuberantly and raise your palm branches high in the air. O Church of Christ, behold, your King comes to you.” But today His city is the Church, and His donkey is humble bread and wine, borrowed from us for His use. These are the lowly vehicles that now bring Him close to save. But today there is a very big difference. Today He isn’t coming to die. Today He is coming to bless and feed us with the fruits of His death – His broken body, and His blood shed for us poor sinners. These are the blessed gifts He freely gives us as our King – as in His Church He reigns over us by His death and resurrection.

Each week in the Communion Liturgy, dear friends, you and I are Jerusalem greeting the Savior as we chant our Hosannas in the song of the Church – as we welcome once again this King who comes to us here in His Holy Supper. Every time we gather around this Altar to receive the Medicine of Immortality, we sing the very same song the people were singing in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday when Jesus came riding into town on a borrowed donkey. Our Hosannas confess our belief that Christ really does come to us – and that He really is present in His Supper with His very own body and His blood to save us. “Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.