

Sermon for the Lent 6 Palmarum – Matthew 21:1-9

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“Ride on, ride on in majesty!/The angel armies of the sky/Look down with sad and wond’ring eyes/To see the-approaching sacrifice.” Our Lord has now been on this course for some time. We’ve seen Him battle against the devil, cast out demons, feed a multitude, and refute the Pharisees. But now, the end is in sight. This donkey, this common beast of burden, will carry Him into Jerusalem one last time- to take Him to the city where he will be sentenced to death. Can’t he stop it? Why must He be such a humble weakling of a God? Don’t we need a God who will triumph over our enemies of sin, death, and the devil and not succumb to them? Can we stand to look into the eyes of the God who dies?

God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross; God seems weak and powerless in the world as Matthew’s Gospel said: “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.” Entering Jerusalem in humility as He did, we’re reminded of His manner of coming into the world: “... [He] made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Our Lord comes in humble form because this is the only way He could come to rescue us. He comes weak and powerless so He can join us, who are weak and powerless because of our sin. Christ redeems us, not by virtue of His omnipotence, not because He is all-powerful and all-mighty, but He redeems us by virtue of His weakness and suffering!

A peculiar phrase turns up in the midst of chapter 8 of St. Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus had just cleansed a leper, healed the Centurion’s servant, cured the fever of Peter’s mother-in-law, cast out many demons, and healed many sick people. And then there’s this somewhat unusual commentary upon these events: “This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.’” Perhaps we imagine that when our Lord cleansed lepers and healed diseases, these illnesses were cast into oblivion – they were gone – out of sight and out of mind. But Matthew’s Gospel would tell us differently: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.” They weren’t whisked away to nowhere; they were taken into His flesh and blood and bone. But it wasn’t only the physical maladies which Christ absorbed into His Person. It was our spiritual woes as well, lest we forget Isaiah’s prophecy: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” All of the iniquities were laid upon Him. All of them! Every juicy piece of gossip, every white lie, and every scathing remark was placed upon His tongue! Every lustful thought and every greedy desire was imputed into His mind! Every act of disrespect and disobedience was charged to Him! Every stolen belonging was placed into His hands! These are our sins,

and every one of our sins is placed upon Him. He becomes weak. He becomes powerless. And then He dies. This is the crucial distinction between genuine Christianity and all other religions. Human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world. "Flee to God's power and might, not some pitiful weakling nailed to a cross!" But the Scriptures direct us toward the powerless and the suffering God, because only the suffering God can save.

John said in his Gospel, "[Christ] was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know Him." How could the world know Him? The world is impressed by power and prestige. He was born in a stable in a tiny town to parents having no royal status. He rode into the great and holy city of Jerusalem on a common donkey, and a borrowed one at that! These are not marks of a worldly ruler. In fact, from the human point of view, this whole incident looks ridiculous as this beggar-King enters the city. Shortly thereafter, His life would be finished upon a cross – there is nothing here in which the world would dare to boast. But for us, this is only thing worth boasting about: "... God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" For us, we dare not boast of anything except the cross and the suffering of Christ, our "weak" God.

He was weak so that we could be delivered from sin, death, and the devil. His sole purpose in coming to earth was to reveal the power of His kingdom, namely, that we escape this wretched, mortal, decaying existence because Christ took upon Himself this wretched, mortal, decaying existence. He was crucified and died, but that's how He overcame sin, death, and the devil for us. By His Blood, we are cleansed of all filth. By His death we pass through temporal death to eternal life. Before this temporal death, we remain poor lost sinners, condemned to death in the devil's clutches. Yet, we also have been redeemed by the blood of Christ from sin, death, and the power of the devil, so that we are righteous before God even today, even before our eternity in Christ's heavenly kingdom. Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Words of Absolution – these are the treasures of Christ's kingdom, which neither moth nor rust can destroy, nor can thieves break in and steal. That's why we greet our King in no entirely different way than did the crowds gathered at the Jerusalem gate, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" We welcome our King who comes in the humble forms of bread and wine in His Body and Blood. Jesus is still our King, in spite of His meekness. He is our eternal King who serves our greatest needs, "not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious Blood and with His innocent suffering and death." To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠