

Fear?

Palm/Passion Sunday

Pastor Josh Frazee

John 12:20-43

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the day. Today. Yesterday is past, tomorrow is unknown. Today is the day.

Today is the celebration of Palm Sunday. Jesus entered Jerusalem riding upon a donkey to shouts of “Hosanna” from the people lining the streets. Even their shouts give acknowledgment that today is the day. “Hosanna” means “save us *now*”—the emphasis I added to show when it was that they were asking to be saved, whether they were aware of it or not.

Yet Jesus knew that the way He was going to save them was not the way in which they expected Him to save them. They desired an earthly king who would conquer the Romans and Caesar and establish the nation of Israel as His earthly kingdom.

In today’s Gospel text, we heard that Jesus was following a different plan. His disciples came to tell Him that there were others seeking to see Him, and He answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” This is the first of a few direct times Jesus said that His time had come. But not His time to establish an earthly rule, but for Him to be “lifted up.”

We will consider how this affected those around Jesus at that time, as well as how it affects us today—and every day that it is called today.

Verse 1

When the disciples told Jesus about the Greeks seeking Him, “Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.’”

In these verses, Jesus mentions the time of now. “The hour has come...” He was not literally on His deathbed the cross yet. But what He said was still applicable to those who heard Him that day. He called those who believed in Him to deny themselves and to follow Him. In order to follow Him, He said that a person must hate his life. Yet this does not mean literal hate. It is a Semitic idiom indicating preference. Those who chose to follow Jesus must prefer Him and His ways over themselves and their own ways. That day, Jesus was calling them to love Him more than themselves—even to the point of death.

Today, Jesus calls us to no less. We may not have any confirmands this year, but you and I know that this is the day that it would usually take place. In the confirmation service, our youth who have begun their studies of the Word and Sacraments in detail confirm that they will continue in the Church, learning about God, His Word, and the Sacraments, even should it come to dying instead of leaving. This is what they would vow: “to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it.” Granted, this is asked as a question—“Do you...?”—but their response is “I do, by the grace of God.”

Today as we hear these words they remind those of us who have taken confirmation vows that we did indeed promise to stay true to God’s Word and the confessions which are proper expositions of the Word and the partaking of the Sacraments rather than fall away from them—even if it should mean that we would die rather than not come and hear and partake.

Have you remained steadfast to that promise which you made before God and the congregation? Have you come continuously to God's Word and learned from the confessions and received the Sacraments without letting anything come between you and them? You and I may have made those promises years ago, but when we promised to do this until "death," God holds us to our words. That is why we are cautioned not to make vows lightly or without earnestness.

Verse 2

Continuing our text, Jesus said, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.'"

Here again Jesus spoke of the then-current time: "Now." His soul was currently troubled by His approaching crucifixion; and yet He did not live for Himself, but lived to bring glory to His Heavenly Father. Jesus was going to—and did—live in faith to God *even* to death. That's why God the Father spoke on His behalf to those gathered around at that time: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

Today we know and believe this to be true. We've been hearing about how God glorified His Son through His signs and earthly ministry. But more importantly, we have heard over the years how God would glorify His name through His Son Jesus' death on the cross of Calvary, and through His bringing Jesus back from the dead on the Third Day.

By His Son's death on the cross at that approaching time, God opened the door for us to come to faith. Without Jesus' death, none of us could be saved. None of us is righteous—no not one. Not me and not you. None of us have been faithful to God to death without sinning like Jesus.

But today your sins have been forgiven. Jesus has gone to the cross and you bear their guilt no more. That's what you were taught in catechism class, and that is what is still being taught in catechesis. And through God's grace through His Son's death, you have received the Spirit of God to believe it and to make the good confession and promise to remain faithful.

Verse 3

Jesus continues: "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

For the third time, Jesus referred to the present. The hour had come for His life to end. And the hour had come for Him to defeat the world and the devil for everyone. Yes, everyone. Everyone's sins would be taken to the cross and paid for on it.

The last thing we will consider today, then, is a question that we discussed in catechism class this year, and its answer. If God the Holy Spirit "earnestly wants to convert all people and bring them to salvation through the Gospel," "Then, why are not all people saved?" The answer is that "Many reject the Word and resist the Holy Spirit; therefore they remain in unbelief and under God's judgment by their own fault."

You might be wondering, then, how anyone could be saved. The answer is in our text. "Jesus said to them, 'The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.'"

Jesus said that you have the light. You have received the Spirit of God to believe in the light, that is, Jesus as the light of God who went to the cross to pay for your sins. So walk in Him. This is not telling you to do something you cannot do. If you did not have the light, you could not do this. But since you have the light, the Spirit of God will work in you so that you do walk in the light. In this way, you will be able to walk without fear, and that you will be able to walk in the promise the Spirit caused you to make at your confirmation that you would remain in the Word and the confessions and the Sacraments to your death. You made the good promise through God's Spirit for the sake of Jesus, and for His sake also, God will continue to work in you through His Spirit to keep you in the one true faith until death. In Jesus' Name. Amen.