

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Palm/Passion Sunday B
March 28, 2021
John 12:12-19

The Story of Two Processions

In the name of Jesus, the King who comes to save us,

Can't you just see it: palms waving, the crowds cheering, a man riding a donkey, and little children singing: "Hosanna!" It's a parade, a procession, full of hope, joy, and life, with the sounds of acclamation and praise. Yet, there's another parade, another procession, on the horizon. That one's full of despair, grief, and death, with sounds of hatred, derision, and mocking. Yet, as different as they are, they are both part and parcel of the one procession of your salvation. For Jesus is the center and focus of both, and it is all for you.

As He humbly entered Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus was riding to His death. Yet the people rejoiced by throwing their cloaks on the ground and waving palm branches. They joyfully proclaimed Him King with their "Hosannas" and "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." And this was most certainly true, though they didn't know how truly they spoke. He truly did come in the name of the Lord for He is the Lord Himself. He had come to save them as they asked, for that's what "Hosanna" means, "save now," though they didn't know exactly what that salvation was or how it would happen. What excitement there was that day! It was a day to be remembered.

Just a few days later, though, everything's different as Jesus is led in procession once again, this time out of Jerusalem, bearing a cross, headed to Golgatha, the place of execution. Though just as humble as His entry, this procession isn't so joyous and hopeful. He has taken the place of Barabbas, and all sinners. He now wears His crown - of thorns - and the marks of His office - the stripes from the flogging and beating. Blood flowed from His sacred head and His many wounds. As this procession wound its way through the streets, there was undoubtedly a different sense and tenor to it. For this was nothing to celebrate; it was a death march. And when it arrived at its destination, Jesus was nailed to that cross and lifted up to die. It was an enthronement procession that was marked by despair, grief, and death.

And yet, this second procession fulfilled the people's shouts during the first, "Hosanna!" Jesus was saving them, and you, from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He was paying the price for your sins, for your rebellion against God, for your going astray from God's Word. The true Barabbas, the true Son of the Father, was saving you by offering the final, perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. The blood He shed was the blood of the Lamb of God which atones for your sins. Though it looked as though all was lost, all was, in fact, found. Forgiveness, life, and salvation were effected for you through Jesus' death as He was enthroned on the cross.

So, while we celebrate Palm Sunday amidst Hosannas and palms, we're reminded that we here on earth aren't the only ones holding palm branches and rejoicing in Christ's salvation. So are our loved ones, our family and friends, who have fallen asleep in Christ. That's the beauty of our life in Christ. It doesn't end in death. Saint John was given a glimpse of what the faithful departed are up to around God's throne:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9-10)

Christ is your Savior too. He came to "hosanna" you, to save you from your sin and its wages. That's why He entered Jerusalem. That's why He allowed Himself to be betrayed, arrested, denied, accused, beaten, crowned with thorns, and crucified. It was all for you!

On this side of death, we are privileged to wave our palm branches to the Lord who comes to us hidden in water, words, bread, and wine, even as we sing His praises. On the other side of death, we are again privileged to wave our palm branches, this time before the throne and the Lamb, clothed in white robes, even as we sing His praises. Indeed, that's the beauty of our life in Christ. It begins here and now and continues for all eternity. Thanks be to God!

So as you process to this altar, do so with the sure and certain faith that our Lord Jesus is here to give you His very Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins. For such a procession is not one of death, but of life. It is a procession that leads you to Jesus' earthly throne to receive His heavenly gifts. As He enters your mouth and body, He saves you, forgives you, and gives you life. Indeed, it is something to celebrate for in His Supper He gives you Himself and that gives you hope and joy and life unending. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener