

Palm Sunday – 2021
Zechariah 9:9-12
Philippians 2:5-11
John 12:12-19

How many of y'all have ever been betrayed? How many of y'all didn't see it coming? Et tu, Brute? It is the most famous response to betrayal in the English language. Of course, it is not English, but Latin. Et tu, Brute? Wm. Shakespeare puts these words in Caesar's mouth on the Ides of March (March 15th) as conspirators assassinate him. Some of these conspirators were expected. Brutus being one of them was not. Marcus Junius Brutus was protégé to Julius Caesar; trusted friend, trusted ally. Astonishment, horror and heartbreak are in those words (you as well, Brutus?). Shakespeare's phrase is not far from the truth. The earliest historian who records what was actually said on that March day in 44 BC quotes Caesar speaking Greek (καὶ σὺ, τέκνον?). It is even more haunting in Greek because Caesar calls Brutus "child" – clearly a term of endearment.

All betrayal is brutal. When it is someone especially close, it is crushing. How many of y'all have ever been betrayed? How many of y'all saw it coming? Jesus rides into the city of His destiny. Hosanna! It was a shout of acclamation, a shout of praise. The crowds are exultant! The King has come. The long-awaited Son of David has arrived! Hosanna means "save us!" One would only shout such a thing to a person that you believed could actually accomplish what you desire. Christ the King had every intention saving them. He was making His way to the apocalyptic tree. Blood and shame, humanity's sin and humanity's guilt slammed into the Holy Son of God. Christ mounts the arms of the cross and there are no shouts of "Hosanna." The Lord had been betrayed. He saw it coming.

Does it hurt? We have pills for pain. For hurt, what do we have? Judas is the one whom we call the "betrayers." He conspired with the chief priests to deliver Jesus over to them. He needed an opportunity when Jesus was isolated from the crowds, defenseless. When the Lord ventured out to the Mount of Olives, Judas' opportunity arrived. Jesus saw it coming. "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me" (Matthew 26:21). None of the disciples saw themselves as immune from such a vile act. Each in turn asks: "Is it I, Lord?" (Matthew 26:22). In that question is a glorious honesty.

Regardless of what you think of his music, regardless of what you think of him personally, you have to admit that Billy Joel is a talented wordsmith. *Piano Man*, *Just the Way You Are*, and *She's Always a Woman to Me* are all songs with great lyrics. Another is titled "*Honesty*." Here is the chorus: "Honesty is such a lonely word; Everyone is so untrue; Honesty is hardly ever heard; And mostly what I need from you." As we wind down from the pandemic and the governmental lockdowns, it is imperative for the church to be honest, to examine her behavior in the past year and evaluate her state of mind and her fidelity to Christ. Every member of this congregation has been asked this question at some point: "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" Why does the church ask this question?

In the Upper Room, at the Last Supper, Peter pledged his undying loyalty. “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33). Later that same night, in the tumult around the chief priest’s house, Peter denied that He even knew the Lord. Jesus saw it coming. “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me” (Luke 22:34). Did it hurt? That betrayal, did it hurt? St. Luke is keen to tell us that upon Peter’s third denial the rooster crowed... “and the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61). Did it hurt? Our Lord, I mean. Did Peter’s denial pain the heart of Jesus?

You better believe it hurt. Love is vulnerable to betrayal, to hurt. The Lord Christ makes Himself vulnerable to us in every way. He sees our betrayals coming; and He loves us anyway, loves us profoundly, unreservedly, loves us lovingly. Where do you think your ability to feel pain comes from? He rides into Jerusalem to the praises of those who would betray Him. Here are the words of betrayal: “Crucify, crucify Him” (Luke 23:21). Here are the words of betrayal: “We have no King but Caesar” (John 19:15). Here are the words of betrayal: “His blood be upon us and our children” (Matthew 27:25). It hurt. But He does not cease to love. That is the God who saves you. There is no other God besides this God who saves you by opening Himself up to your betrayals.

In light of this, what is to be our reaction? We are to repent. We are to see our sin in the cold light of betrayal. Our Lord is not an invulnerable deity who is detached from the actions of those whom He created. He is open to you, linked to you and that is precisely the way that He wants it. To be sure, He suffers no more. No more whips and no more spikes; no more spit and no more crown of thorns – but He is still open, still pained by mockery from those He loves. Those closest to Him, among whom you are to consider yourself, (His dear and precious disciples) we are called to honor that trust, honor that relationship, honor His love.

Hosanna is not just a religious word that we conjure up on Palm Sunday. Hosanna is the constant cry of penitent sinners who need precisely what this King bestows. That ancient day is over. Jesus rides into Jerusalem no more; seated on no colt, no foal, no donkey. That day is over. Historically, the Scripture has been fulfilled. Zechariah’s prophecy has been enacted, never to be repeated – this one-time event. But the King still makes a Triumphant Entry. That great and mighty day is recapitulated. That great and mighty entrance is recapitulated. In this place, wherever two or three are gathered in His name, wherever Christ and Him crucified is proclaimed, there an entry is taking place. Hosanna! We need the King. We need the One who comes to us in the Name of the Lord. We have betrayed Him with our greed and our pride and our lust and our selfishness – and He comes to us because He is eager to restore us.

He comes to us Triumphantly. To greet Him with joy is the response of faith. Pilgrims still line the aisle to receive Him who comes to us with His triumph. You line the center this of holy house as you make your way to the altar to greet your King and welcome Him who comes to us in His body and blood. This Divine Service is the contemporary extension to that high and exultant day – Palm Sunday. Worship is not to recall ancient events in a spirit of ecstasy. Worship is to have your eyes open to the One who is present among us with His accomplished Triumph, receiving what He wills to give with eagerness, joy, gratitude, and faith. Christ the King Lutheran Church is, for us, the new Jerusalem. With the table set for a Eucharistic Feast, we sing those same words knowing that the crucified and risen Lord comes to feed us with holy

food. Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.

You mean so very much to Him. He delights in the bond that He has forged with you. He delights to be in your company, to serve you with His gifts, to favor you with His holiness, to share what He is and what He has done. When we say “Hosanna” we look to what He is doing presently, while singing of His accomplished deeds. Cross and tomb, Upper Room and altar, Creation and Easter, this Divine Service and our end in heaven – it all converges in one blessed moment. Our delightful chancel conveys this truth. Depicted in this space are those who have gone before us, holding palm branches and crying out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:10). We join them and they join us.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He saw this Divine Service coming. He labored on the cross to ensure this day, this delightful day, this bright and grace-full day. “Hosanna” is realized as you come on bended knee to receive Him who comes in the name of the Lord. Rejoice and be glad, your King comes to you. Righteous and having salvation, your King comes to you.