

Palm Sunday – 2022
Deuteronomy 32:36-39
Philippians 2:5-11
John 12:12-19

There is a forlorn stanza from one of our hymns that captures a great conflict in Christianity. Listen well for it is hauntingly poetic, apropos for this week, and an open portal to the most beautiful words you will ever hear:

Sometimes they strew His way
And His sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day
Hosannas to their King.
Then “Crucify!”
Is all their breath,
And for His death
They thirst and cry.

(My Song is Love Unknown, LSB 430).

Jesus rides into Jerusalem and the crowd is euphoric, delighted to greet Him. Messianic titles are the verbal ticker-tape that welcome Him into the city of His destiny. “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” Are these the same people who change their tune to something with a decidedly darker motif? “Crucify, crucify him.” “His blood be upon us and our children.” “We have no king but Caesar.”

Was the Triumphal Entry meaningless? Were the pilgrims to Jerusalem so spiritually vapid, so spiritually capricious and empty that their praise of the King is mere bluster? All those “Hosannas,” did they come out of the mouths of people whose faith was a mile wide and an inch deep? Was the Triumphal Entry meaningless, an exercise in religious enthusiasm that was as durable as helium in a rubber balloon, as durable as a hen in a fox-house? Isn’t this the same crowd that asks for a murderer to be released to them instead of Jesus? The three people who suggested that Peter was Galilean and a follower of the Lord Christ, were those three in the crowd that shouted “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday? Lazarus was raised from the dead shortly before Jesus entered Jerusalem. A great crowd, people who were familiar with what the Lord Christ had done on a first-hand basis, did they shout “Hosanna” on Sunday and “Crucify” on Friday? Was the Triumphal Entry meaningless?

Do you believe, like I do, that our culture is suffering from a crisis of meaning? There’s an old country song from the 80’s that describes our world presently:

I was lookin’ for love in all the wrong places
Lookin’ for love in too many faces
Searchin’ their eyes
Lookin’ for traces of what I’m dreaming of.

Okay, so it’s not a classic hymn but the point is apt. Almost everything is being turned into a religion. Folks are looking to the wrong things to bring meaning into their lives. The people in Jerusalem, did they want a political leader, a messianic “white knight” who would restore

Israel's fortunes, who would run Pontius Pilate and his Roman brigade out of town? When Jesus didn't deliver, did they turn on Him? Is politics a religion for you? Feminism, Green New Dealers, LGBTQ advocates, Critical Race Theory promoters, 1619 Project activists – looking for meaning in all the wrong places. Do you think that Covid became a religion for some folks?

Solomon came to an unsurprising conclusion: Worldly life is meaningless. He looked everywhere for meaning. He looked to pleasure, he looked to work, he looked to propping himself up with man's wisdom, he looked to human effort and wealth and possessions. He looked inside himself, he looked to physical beauty, he looked to wine, women, and song, to anything and everything that was in the world. When the search was concluded the emptiness came spilling out in his report: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Except in Christ.

Jesus rides into Jerusalem for the express purpose of infusing meaning into life. He is life's content and He came to redeem humanity. He *is* the King, the Son of David, as He rides into the City of David on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Mild, He lays His glory by and makes His way to the apocalyptic tree. Meaning! The Son of God came to restore humanity and give us hope. The Son of God takes our flesh, sets His face toward Jerusalem and lays down His life. Meaning! We are so treasured as to inspire God's Son to take upon Himself our sin. Real sin was animating the cross and Jesus knew what He would bear. And to that cross He came; for you. Meaning! Apart from Christ, life *is* vain, meaningless, a chasing of the wind and simply one day after another until the grave claims us. In Christ we have purpose, dignity (individually and corporately, as His church). We interact with Him and then, as we interact with our neighbor, God Himself works through us, scattering abroad blessing and truth and light and grace and meaning.

Every station in life is consequential. Every Christian in every circumstance is engaged in a life that is full of meaning. Faith has many domains, many fruitful fields where it spreads the aroma of Christ to others, where service above self witnesses to the One who serves us all, where the simple joys of life – family and humor and work and food and music and rest and creation's beauty – where all those joys have deep meaning for us because we see the One who is behind them all, who gives and gives and gives. Struggle and pain have meaning for us for those difficulties force us to lean on Christ more and more. Jesus reveals Himself to us in a unique way when we suffer. Faith and trust transform our pain from meaningless agony to something that actually enriches our lives. "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). There is great meaning in those words.

Christ entered triumphantly into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It was not the acclamation of man that made it a triumphant entry. He brought God's Kingdom. Every place that Jesus enters is a triumphant entry. Mary's womb – that was a triumphant entry; "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28). Jairus' house... "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mark 5:41). That was a triumphant entry. He entered the tomb where He resided for parts of three days *triumphantly*. "Hosanna; save us, King of kings!" He entered the tomb to shatter death, to break the ancient bond in which sin held us. He entered a locked room in Triumph, saying to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side" (John 20:27).

Do you think that Thomas then knew that there was meaning to his life? “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

That first Palm Sunday was one of the most significant, meaningful days that there has ever been. It keeps getting recapitulated, over and over, among Christians in every era. The crucified and Triumphant Messiah comes into our assembly, bringing His kingdom, and we greet Him with great joy, with acclamation, with a Spirit-born awareness of who He is and what He has done. We are the contemporary pilgrims who have made our way to the new Jerusalem that is this holy house. Save us! Hosanna! Blessed is He! It is the cry of penitent sinners who have had their eyes opened to the glory of our very present Messianic King. To greet Him aright is to infuse our lives with extraordinary meaning. Our table is set for a Eucharistic Feast. Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day, we sing Palm Sunday words and eternal meaning invades this holy assembly. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He saw this Divine Service coming. He labored on the cross to ensure the wonder of this day and that labor is the opposite of vanity. Save us! Hosanna! That petition is realized as you come on bended knee to receive Him who comes in the Name of the Lord. With His Resurrection Triumph He comes to you and He brings meaning.