

Sermon March 29, 2015 - Palm Sunday

## Your King Comes In!

John 12:12–19

Dear Friends in Christ



Often you will encounter well-meaning Christians who ask you things like “when were you born again” or “when did you give your heart to Christ” or have you accepted Christ into your hearts.” Although well-meaning for after all they seek our salvation, and I think we should learn of their endeavoring attitude when it comes to evangelism, it’s not how God works, the sinner does not, cannot to accept Christ, but it is Christ

who accepts us, for it is Him who comes in in each one of our hearths, in the same way He comes into Jerusalem.

Today we observe Palm Sunday, the day when Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, with palm branches and shouts of hosanna those who liked Jesus welcomed him, but the rest of people, especially those who were in authority did not accept Jesus at all, in fact demanded that He and his followers would silence. And those who were welcoming him and shouting hosanna did not have it all clear why where doing what they were doing. So what was their reason for welcoming Jesus? The Gospel reading for Palm Sunday tells us that it was because they had seen and heard that Jesus had raised Lazarus from de death. “The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.” (V. 18) Even the disciples did not understand what Jesus was doing that day. It was not until Jesus came back to life that they did understand everything that had happened.

But Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem was so that he would free His people from oppression and death cause by sin, but in order to do it, he had to come in, into the heart of Israel, Jerusalem and from within destroy sins hostility against God. More or less he was like the Trojan horse. I think you’ll remember the legend.

The legend tells us that once upon a time, a long time ago, there was a city named Troy. Troy was located on the coast of Asia, across the sea from the Greek city-state of Sparta. In those days, people used to build walls around their city to help protect them. The people built gates in the wall. The gates could be opened to let people enter the city. But in times of war, the gates could be closed and locked to stop intruders from entering.

The walls around Troy were very high and very strong. According to the legend, for ten long years, the Greeks had been trying to get over the wall around the city of Troy, but they never could. And the Trojans could not drive the Greeks away. Year after year, they fought. And year after year, neither side won.

One day, a Greek general, Odysseus, had an idea. “Let’s pretend to sail away,” he suggested. “We’ll leave a gift for Troy, a gift to announce the end of the war, a large wooden horse.” That was the way things were done then. When you admitted defeat, you supplied a gift. It could be a gift of money, art, slaves, anything really. It made sense to leave a gift of art, for the Greeks were famous for their art.

Could this finally trick the Trojans? The Greeks thought it was a brilliant idea. They had their best artists build a magnificent horse. When it was ready, the Greeks brought the huge wooden horse as close to Troy's city gates as they could without being shot full of arrows. Then, the Greeks pretended to sail away.

When the Trojan archers saw the Greeks leaving, they could not believe their eyes. Were the Greeks giving up at last? Had the Trojans won the war? It certainly appeared so! The Trojans dragged the horse inside their city, closed the gates, and celebrated!

But the horse had a little surprise for the Trojans! Hidden away inside were thirty Greek soldiers, and later that night, while the Trojan people slept soundly, exhausted from their celebrations, the thirty Greeks hidden inside the wooden horse climbed out, opened the gates of Troy, and let the Greek army inside. That was the end of Troy.

Actually Fleming Rutledge, in his book "Not Ashamed of the Gospel" calls Palm Sunday "*the Trojan horse of the Church Year.*"<sup>1</sup>

Why? Because a humble donkey bears a Rabbi from Nazareth into the city of Jerusalem, but once inside, He conquers sin, death, and satan to set us free.

Because of sin we cannot recognize God for Who or What He really is. Sin has seized control of the human race, and each one of us individually. It is not a misdeed here or there or a misjudgment we've made, or a foul language we have spoken and misdemeanors, rather sin is a force that controls our entire lives (Rom 5:12). And, not only controls our lives, but has killed our understanding of God, our relationship with God, and our relationships with one another. ISIS, Atheism, Agnosticism, are the result what sin does in each one of us. Addictions, broken families, theft, and so on, are the result of sin. Things we can't free ourselves from so easily. Sin oppresses us, it blinds us, it distorts our perception of God, for who truly he is. It is sin that leads us to build walls of our own reasons that battle with God and even reject Him entirely.

But so that we can be freed and saved it is God through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the one who has to come in and free us from inside. Yes he needs to come into our hearts, but He does it on His own, not on our own decision or acceptance of Him being in us.

Isn't that what happened on that day? Like the people of old could not free themselves even from their earthly oppressors, the Romans, and certainly from the condemnation of sin, and its consequence, death, eternal death, an eternal separation from God in the fires of hell, as the Scriptures tell us. Jesus had to come and save them.

So we who are prisoners in the waterless pit, trapped in the grave of despair, cannot save ourselves, we need a Savior.

But God has a plan to set us free. His plan is Jesus, the humble King who rides a donkey into Jerusalem. And once inside Jerusalem, the city, and all it stands for, is besieged from within as the King does battle with sin. First, Jesus clears the temple from the stench of the sin of economical transactions in God's house, and then he teaches important lessons of Law and Gospel.

But towards the end of the week Jerusalem fights back, doesn't like what's seen and hearing, and so they crucify the humble King, they hang him in shame on a cross. For a time, it will seem as if evil has won. But this too, is part of the plan!

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<sup>1</sup> Fleming Rutledge, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 79.

Satan is duped! Before he knows it, the King will appear in power—alive!—in Satan's own fortress.

The King in his humility appears weak and helpless, yet his humility is actually his most powerful weapon. Jesus never exalts himself. He remains truly innocent. His weapon in the war against sin is his own active righteousness—his perfect obedience to God's plan, which is credited to us.

Salvation comes when this active obedience and righteousness in our place is completed with his willingness to go to the cross and dies, taking our punishment on himself. There, he sheds his blood, dies, according to God's covenant with us.

But on the third he will rise again and present himself in hell as victor over Satan (1 Pet 3:18–19). On the third day the Kingdom of life will defeat the Kingdom of death. From there on, Satan's power is no more. And all was done because of us, but in turn His victory is for each of us.

Therefore today, we rejoice and shout aloud, for we are restored as God's children and given the victory we could never win for ourselves.

Now all is good! Thanks be to God! But how is it that Jesus enters our hearts then? How is that we don't receive him in, but that He does come on His own accord? And if so, why is it that there not many Christians being received in our congregations? After all God is powerful and could come at any time, right?

That's right! God's is powerful and is constantly knocking on the doors of our hearts to come in. He does it through various means. First His word! His preached word is what creates faith in each of us, and once faith is created there salvation happens, for the same faith will bring us to the recognition of our sin but also the recognition that in God there is forgiveness. There through His active preached Word the Holy Spirit is working to bring us into faith!

Next, through the means of Grace, mainly baptism and Holy Communion, there also God creates saving faith in each of us. Humble and simple means of preaching, water and bread and wine, are tools God uses to instill saving faith in our hearts. That's how he comes in, and through his spirit dwells in each of our hearts, that's how He comes in.

There is value in hearing God's words, there is value in abiding in God's words, there is value in receiving the sacraments regularly and appropriately, so that saving faith not only remains but also increases and in the end we be saved.

When we dismiss God's word, or confuse it with something else we let go of our saving faith. It is as if we are telling Jesus: "I don't want you in my heart anymore." Now, can we do that? Of course, as a matter of fact that's what we do often, that's what people who have been baptized and confirmed have done when they left church. When people leave church is not that they are leaving an organized religion as so often we hear, or a traditional denomination, no, there is a deeper problem because that person is leaving God's word and all his gifts to us that are administered by the church.

But all happens because of sin. Oh, we know that! All happens because of sin, unrecognized sin, and certainly unconfessed sin.

I want you to recognize something today. Your baptism! When you were baptized as a Baby, you weren't asked permission or a declaration of your faith, although we ask the parents to respond for you, but you yourself just were there and received the waters of baptism. There, Troy happened all over again. There in the gift

of baptism Christ came in to you! Don't despise that, don't throw that away, don't get baptized again, not only doesn't make any sense to do it again for there is only one baptism, one Lord and one faith. Some argue, well you need to make a decision for yourself, well again, as seen earlier, we can't sins prevents from making a faith decision. It is Christ who saves us by coming in our hearts and yes baptism becomes the Trojan horse, in a good way.

When you receive Holy Communion, sometimes we think the outward manners of taking communion affects our faith. Other than having repented of your sins and believing that what you are receiving is Jesus Body and Blood, doesn't matter how you take communion, standing kneeling, seating... what matter is what's happening, and yes is Troy all over again, for in the seemingly humble manner of bread and wine, we do receive the might power of God's Flesh and Blood, that not only renews us but there in receive the fruits of Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us. It is your King coming in!

*Conclusion:*

Our Gospel reading was the fulfillment of what God promised his people of old will happen, and they were told: Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem, for "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!"

May the same words be spoken to each one of us today: "Rejoice greatly, O people of God, shout aloud, O sinner, for "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!"

This humble King who rides into Jerusalem is truly the Son of God! And once he enters the city—much to the horror of his enemies—there's no stopping him. He sets us free, that we may follow the example of his great humility and patience and be made partakers of his resurrection. May the Holy Spirit enable us to never reject Him but in gratitude and thanksgiving rejoice for He is in, in each of our hearts!

Amen.