

Sermon Palm Sunday 2019

April 14, 2019

John 12:12-19

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we'll meditate on the Palm Sunday Procession Gospel Lesson, especially these words: "Fear not."

Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt! Don't be afraid. In the Greek *mē phobou*. And I'm sure you could hear it there: phobou, as in phobia. Don't have a phobia. As I was reading this week, I found that this word comes from a stem which means to flee. It also relates to man's encounter with force. A force comes, and we want to flee from it.

But as we think of this, fear is not an uncommon topic in the Bible, is it? We see it all over. To start we know it tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We see Moses was afraid to look at God in the burning bush. We see the Israelites were afraid when God spoke the Ten Commandments to them, such that they asked Moses to be the only one who spoke to them. The people who saw Jesus heal the man possessed by Legion were afraid at His power to heal. The disciples feared a great fear when Jesus calmed the storm

But what do we fear? I was reading book review about a book called "American Messiahs" which is about various groups in US history. These are groups like the Shakers, groups who separate themselves very distinctly from the culture around often because of the fear that the Lord will come back at any time. Of course, that fear isn't in and of itself a bad thing. There should be a fear there in a sense. Think about what He says in the Old Testament Lesson: "**See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.**" The immanence of that return brings fear.

Or then we as a Church might look at the way some of those groups were so enthusiastic that they drew many converts, we might look at that and fear for ourselves; that if we don't get on the stick we'll lose ground to those people who are really passionate. Which as a note, first of all, if you aren't passionate about your faith, you need to repent. We should be zealous and dedicated to what the

Lord has done and to what He has called us. But that passion doesn't always have to look like what those groups make it out to be. And so when we look at that we can fear.

Or we can fear how life will be for us, for our aging bodies. Will our bodies break down even more, bringing more pain, more suffering to us? Will we get sick? What will bring about our demise? Or what about life for our children and grandchildren. That can really bring fear, can't it? I mean look at the cliff that morality is jumping off, and that makes us afraid. As a pastor I think about that. What will my life look like? Will the life of the Church in the U.S. continue such that I will always be able to work and support my family? Will I be persecuted? Will my children be persecuted for the faith? Will their children? Will they all remain in the faith or succumb to pressure to leave it?

As we reflect on this we have to acknowledge, then, that fear and unbelief go hand in hand. Think about it. What is unbelief but breaking the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods?" And how do we define that? "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." When we fear something besides God, we are not trusting Him right? Think about the fall into sin, it goes all the way back to that. I was thinking about that this week, the fall into sin was the first case of FOMO-fear of missing out. Think about it, the serpent came to Eve and asked her "Did God really say?... Did God really say not to eat of the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil," and she responded, "He sure did. He said not to eat of it, not even to touch it lest we die." Which by the way, I think I've made this point before, but that's not what we see in Genesis Two, He only says not to eat of it. So we already see a break down, but then the Devil goes on: "Oh, no, you won't die! No, no, you won't die. God knows then you'll be like Him. He knows that then you'll know good and evil." And there was the fear: "Maybe I'm missing out on something." The fear grounded in the idea that God's got something better that He's keeping from me. See that's so often the fear with God, isn't it? I fear that if I live as God says, if I keep His commandments, then I'll miss out on something better.

And so where do we comfort ourselves in that fear? Sadly, so often, we find comfort in those sins. We find comfort in the enjoyment we get from them. We find comfort in our bank accounts, in our comfortable houses and cars. We find

comfort in the joys of this life. Even the good gifts from God, family, country, food, even these become our comfort. Or when our conscience pricks us we find comfort in the assurance that we're not that bad. "Surely God is happy with you, you're a good person!"

I was waiting for an elevator this week and a person asked me how I was doing, and I said, "as always, better than I deserve." To which he responded that it was a horrible thought. We seek comfort away from that thought, don't we? Comfort in this world.

And that's just what we see in this lesson. The people taking comfort in the midst of their fears by the things in this world. The Pharisees take comfort in their desire to get rid of Jesus. After all they have the fear that crowds are leaving them: **"You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."** This is what that crowd was doing too, they were celebrating Jesus because they expected Him to usher in the earthly kingdom that would bring all of the security and comfort they wanted in being free from the Roman Empire. They wanted another David, but greater; another Solomon but wealthier. And they were celebrating the arrival of that king, waving their palm branches in symbolism of His victory to come.

But as the week of Holy Week progressed, what happened to them? Well sure they could have made the association of that verse, **"Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"** but even that verse could give cause for a broken confidence. Even that verse could elicit some doubt, some fear. Why? Well, what do you imagine kings traversing upon? Do you picture them riding donkeys? No. Usually it's majestic steed, a Budweiser Clydesdale, or the equivalent, right? But this donkey? That's not the picture of a king. That's not the picture of THE king.

And then there's the rest of the week with its happenings, as we'll revisit this week. There's the betrayal by one who ate bread with Him. There's the mockery of a trial with the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council. There's the inquiry before Pilate and Herod, back and forth, shoved around at the will of others. Then the scorn and contempt as He's crowned with thorns instead of a legitimate golden headpiece. That's not to mention the beating, the scourging, the bleeding. Then weakness of carrying the cross, and finally dying. Sure He says He could summon angels to

protect Him, and avenge what's happening, but what finally happens? The death of that King.

And there's fear there. But we have to see this for what it was. Like the Epistle lesson said, **"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."** This was the way it was supposed to be. Yes in worldly terms, this doesn't look like much besides a lowly Jewish carpenter hanging for being a little too convinced that He was God's Son. Yes, this is an insignificant sacrifice of a man to preserve a people from being squashed by a ruler who doesn't take too kindly to rebellions.

But in the eyes of God, it's far beyond that: **The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.** Jesus is that King whose kingdom is not of this world.

Yes we have all this fear, fear of what God's doing, fear of the loss of our comfort, fear of the loss of our position in the world. Fear that we won't be able to pay the bills. And in the midst of that Jesus is the King who brings true comfort. He's the King crucified in weakness, because in that weakness He was overcoming the powers of this world. In that weakness He was still not fearing, still not doubting God, but trusting perfectly in our place.

And it's in that weakness that our salvation is accomplished. And in the resurrection, then, our fear is overcome. Our fear is conquered. We have that promise, that because He was forsaken, God looks to us and tells us, "Never will I leave you, and never will I forsake you."

With that promise, that care, we can see that the One whom we are to fear properly, above all things, also is that One whom we can love and trust above all things as well. So trust Him, love Him, know that He loves you. Know that as we might seek to flee from the forces that press upon us, as we might flee from them to take comfort in the world, Jesus is our King who brings the true comfort. So Fear not Christian, your King comes to you. Amen.