

Sermon Palm-Passion Sunday 2021

March 28, 2021

Matthew 21:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Palm Sunday Gospel Lesson previously read for the precession, as well as the two verses following that passage which read:

**And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?”
And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”**

As we hear in those verses that the city of Jerusalem was “stirred up” about Jesus in the time following this Triumphal Entry on the first Palm Sunday, it’s clear that Jesus was making an impact. The word there, in fact, says that Jerusalem was *eseisthe*, where we get our word seismograph, the gauge for measuring earthquakes. The city was quaking in view of this man entering into it. Of course a couple of things go along with this. First of all, it’s clear that this isn’t the first time Jesus had been to Jerusalem. We assume that Jesus’ ministry was three years because there are three Passover festivals in the Gospel of John. This one that they were celebrating was that third and as was presumably their custom, Jesus and the disciples were going to the Temple as the Law instructed. In fact, the Law instructed them to go to the Temple for Passover, for the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, and the Feast of Pentecost. So, we would assume that Jesus was at the Temple for each of those, every year of His life, just as we heard of Him being there when He was twelve for the Passover in Luke’s Gospel. So, the first thing is that this wasn’t the first time Jesus had been to Jerusalem. The second is that this time was different. This time Jesus made special provisions as He went, provisions for getting the donkey. And He knew what was coming. He knew that His miracle work had drawn enough attention. He knew that His healings had stirred the crowd to sufficient fever pitch that as He rode in, the King coming to the people “**humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden,**” they would gather and celebrate. They would honor Him. Even though He had been in Jerusalem before, this time was going to be different. That’s the second thing.

And in this we see how this makes waves in the city. Jerusalem responds to this. Now, I looked this up and it’s uncertain how many people lived in Jerusalem at that time. Some guesses were around 70,000-80,000, others closer to 100,000. The lowest guesses say it could have been as small as 20,000, and the highest 250,000. Additionally, there would have been a huge influx of Jews there for the feast of the Passover. And Jesus

made quite the entrance. He did so to the point that people knew Him. And what did they say? They said, **“This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”**

Now, we have to understand that as Jesus rode in the people hailed Him to be the Son of David, and now they’re hailing Him to be this prophet. This is messianic language, these are names calling Him the Messiah. It seems like they get it, doesn’t it? I think every time I preach on this passage, I find myself returning to this point, but we have to hear it over and over again. They do think He’s the Messiah. They do think He’s the eschatological Prophet, the One promised in Deuteronomy 18, the One who would be greater than Moses. They do think He’s going to bring the Kingdom of God. But they get it wrong. How so?

They think His Kingdom is going to be of this world. They think that this Jesus is going to rule where David ruled and bring the glory back to Israel as this Nation dwelling to the west of the Jordan, with their temple in Jerusalem being restored to a glory beyond comparison, even when considering the Temple Solomon ruled over. And if you look at that Temple Herod the Great had built, the One Jesus would be clearing out in this Holy Week, you can understand why. That structure was monstrous. It was dominating. Apparently, it was 150 feet tall, that’s fifteen stories. Of course, compared to the Sears’ Tower, that’s not that much, but it sure would have been then. You can picture some of the imaginations they had of what that glory would be. But they didn’t get it.

As I’m using that language of glory there, I think it’s a great time to bring up a topic I like to mention periodically. That’s a distinction we make as Lutherans between being what we call theologians of the cross versus theologians of glory. These Israelites looking for this earthly king, this earthly messiah, were theologians of glory. They thought the glory was going to be here. They thought the glory was coming now.

And of course, the reason why I bring this up, why I mention the Jews not getting it then every time I preach on this passage in some way or another, is because we have to watch being theologians of glory ourselves. We have to be careful that we don’t get sucked into the mindset that we will have the fulfillment of God’s promises now in this life. We have the promises of that glory now. We can be certain that the fulness of God’s Kingdom is ours. We can be certain that as we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection next Sunday that the victory He won in that new life from the grave, that victory means something for us now, it empowers us now, it brings joy and new life to us now. But we also have to understand that the fulness of that isn’t ours yet.

I know I've been saying this a lot lately, but I was struck by it again this week as we had the vaccine clinic. You know, we had a lot of people here that were not connected with the Church, and so I wouldn't expect that they would understand the world as we do, but it still saddened me that some people were so excited about the vaccine. Now, as is hopefully clear, and as I've been saying, I'm not telling people not to get the vaccine, but as I've been saying the last few weeks, to think about how much more excited people are about the vaccine than they are about receiving the Lord's Supper, about how here in this holy meal, we have the vaccine to the sin that truly ails us, and yet where is the excitement for that? The beauty of meeting our Savior here at this rail giving us His body and blood for our eternal good, and we're more excited to be inoculated from the coronavirus. Why? Because we get more excited for the glory of things now.

And there are so many other ways we see this too. You see this in things like how we treat something like mental illness. Over the course of years, I've heard Christians speak of things like depression and act as though a true Christian shouldn't have an issue with depression. That would be a theology of glory. Depression is something that we have as a consequence from the fall into sin. You see it clearly reflected in the Psalms even. The Psalmists speak of things like soaking their couches with tears, and the sorrow that fills their eyes. That's the reality now. That doesn't mean that a Christian who wrestles with it should stop wrestling, or that the light of Christ is meaningless for bringing light in that darkness even now. It also doesn't mean that our faith can't be extremely helpful in aiding our struggle with those challenges. But to assume that our faith promises we'll never have depression is assuming the fulfillment of the glory now that we won't have completely until Christ's return.

The same goes for only talking about the happy things of the faith in Church, and not discussing our sin. That's something that's easy to assume as well. It's easy to assume that all that we should talk about is just the love of God and the joy of the resurrection. Granted, I should tell you of that resurrection every week in one way or another, but the beauty of that hope that we have and will fully experience when Lord returns is understood for how amazing it will be when we contrast it with the brokenness of the world. But as we confuse all of this, this shows that we have an ingrained delusion that we will be able to have the glory now. It shows us that we are all theologians of glory. If we weren't, we wouldn't be so nervous about the state of the world. The current political climate would create pits in our stomach. The fears we have about a viral pandemic wouldn't arrest us into paralyzation. If we weren't theologians of

glory we wouldn't have such high hopes and attachments to this world that this would create the anxieties we're experiencing. But we think it's going to be good now. And if we're doing well, we maybe even think that Jesus is going to be the One who's going to make it all good now. But of course as we think that, we put Jesus on the same earthly throne the Jews did. We too crown Him and quake about Him as the earthly prophet and messiah.

But, His Kingdom is not of this world. His reign in this world isn't on a throne, it's on the cross. And that's where it actually results in the greatest glory. As we shift from being theologians of glory to being theologians of the cross, we see that it's actually far better. Don't get me wrong, it's a challenge now. It's that challenge that Jesus Himself speaks to you when He tells you to pick up your cross daily and deny yourself. It's that challenge that comes with drowning our old Adam, our old sinful nature, in daily contrition and repentance as our baptism indicates. And it's finally that challenge that only Jesus Himself could fulfill; that challenge He fulfilled on the cross for you. He fulfilled it on the cross for you, dying for where you have fallen short, and rising again that the fulfillment could be yours. And He gives you the promise of that fulfillment, the down payment, the earnest money of His Holy Spirit in baptism, and He continues to assure you of it in the meal of His body and blood in His Holy Supper. Christians, that cross is yours. That death is the death of your sin, and the glory is promised to you by His resurrection. The fulfillment will be when He comes again, but the promise is certain for you now.

Christians, as He rode into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday, as they called Him that prophet, as Jerusalem quaked with the news of His arrival as their King, that's the true Kingdom He was bringing. The Kingdom that had to come through the cross. But understand that had it not paved its path on the road with that cross, you never would have the ability to enjoy it. Had Jesus been a theologian of glory, He never would have been able to share it with you. But Jesus knew the only way His Kingdom could ever come to you was by that cross. And His Messianic Kingdom wasn't of this world. It could only be one which would arrive with the New Heavens and the New Earth. And as you hear of His arrival in Jerusalem, know that this is the prophet, this is the Son of David. He truly is. And He is that so that you could share in the ultimate and final glory He will bring on the last day. Amen.