

Palm Sunday – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Matthew 21:1-9: “Do You Hear What the Children Are Saying?”
April 1/2, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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We thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have revealed Your saving truth, not to the wise and understanding, but to us little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will (Mat. 11:25-26). Grant that we continue to gladly hear and learn Your holy Word, grow in the grace and knowledge of Your truth, and find our eternal rest by faith in Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” / This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, “*Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’*” / The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and He sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before Him and that followed Him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who gladly hears the praise from the mouths of us little children, dear fellow redeemed:

The Jews traveled to Jerusalem from all directions to prepare for the Passover. They arrived at least a week early, so they could take part in the purification rites before the feast (Joh. 11:55). As they connected with friends and family in the holy city, the topic of conversation in the homes, in the streets, and in the temple was Jesus—Jesus of Nazareth (v. 56).

Not long before this, maybe a few months, Jesus had gone to Bethany where His friend Lazarus had died and was buried. Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus got there, but Jesus called him out of the tomb, alive and well. Now Jesus returned to Bethany where he enjoyed a dinner with Lazarus and others on the Sabbath, on Saturday.

Word came to Jerusalem that Jesus was there, so large crowds came to see both Him and Lazarus, the formerly dead man walking (Joh. 12:9). By the time Sunday arrived, it is certain

that all Jerusalem knew about the presence of Jesus. When they heard that He was coming to the city, they went out to meet Him, not just hundreds, not just thousands, but very likely tens of thousands!

They had come to welcome their King. They made a carpet of palm branches and cloaks. They cheered His arrival. They shouted His praises. They sang the words of an old song—perhaps a thousand years old—*“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”* The crowds on every side of Jesus were of all types—some old, some young; some darker-skinned, some lighter-skinned; some wealthy, some poor; men, women, and children.

We can picture ourselves in the crowd, watching Jesus go by, riding on a donkey. The sound was like a stadium filled with excited fans. *“Hosanna! Here He comes! The One who has power over death! He is not afraid! Here comes the Conqueror! The King! Hosanna to the Son of David!”* As you picture the people, I want you especially to find the children in the crowd. Some of them cling tightly to their parents’ legs as they watch Jesus come. Some are held in their mothers’ arms or sit on their fathers’ shoulders. Some of the older children dart around through the crowd or climb the trees to get a better look.

Some of them had probably seen Jesus before. They could have been part of the crowds of five thousand or four thousand who were miraculously fed from the small amount of loaves and fish. They could have been among those whom Jesus welcomed when the disciples wanted to shoo them away. *“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them,”* said Jesus, *“for to such belongs the kingdom of God’.... And he took them in his arms and blessed them”* (Mar. 10:14,16).

Whether they had seen Him before or not, the children would not forget this day. They would remember the great crowd and a humble Lord entering the city on Palm Sunday. We can tell what an impact this had on the children by the fact that they were still clustered around Him and singing His praises the next day.

Jesus spent the night of Palm Sunday back in Bethany (Mar. 11:11). When He returned to Jerusalem on Monday morning, His first order of business was to clear the temple of those who were buying and selling. They had turned the temple into a place for commerce instead of honoring it as a place of prayer. Wherever Jesus went that day, the children followed Him crying out, *“Hosanna to the Son of David!”* The chief priests and scribes were so bothered by this that they complained to Jesus: *“Do you hear what these are saying?”* And He said to them, *“[H]ave you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise’?”* (Mat. 21:16).

The children were doing what God had called them to do. They were telling the truth, and they were praising their Lord. Their faithfulness was a wonderful witness to everyone around them. The clear and faithful confession of children still has this effect among us. It strengthens us to hear the simple and honest words of children as they sing, *“Jesus loves me! This I know, / For the Bible tells me so,”* as they recite their Christmas program passages, and as they publicly confess their faith in front of church before their Confirmation day.

There are reciprocal blessings as we train our children in the Word of God. They benefit from our efforts by learning more about what God has done for them. And we benefit by hearing

them repeat and confess what they have learned. The beauty of the children's confession is that they haven't learned to doubt what God tells them in His Word. They believe what the Bible says.

That changes as we get older. Then we want to question everything. We provide evidence from the difficulties in our lives that God must not love us as much as He says He does, or that He must not be as powerful as we thought. But what is actually happening is that the devil, the world, and our own flesh are tempting us to doubt the sure promises of God. God hasn't changed, and neither has His Word. What changes is you and me. We decide that chasing riches, fame, and pleasure in the world is better than the eternal gifts of God. And if someone calls us out for living different than the Bible says, we often get mad at them. We embrace the sin and cast aside the Word.

Or we maintain a belief in Jesus, but we keep it mostly to ourselves. We don't want people to think we are pushing our beliefs on them. We don't want them to think we are weird. So we keep our mouths shut. We don't warn our friends about their bad behavior. And we don't share the hope we have of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus.

Little children don't make these careful calculations. They say what they believe. Sometimes they even annoy their parents by pointing out when their parents do or say something wrong. Children are constantly watching, learning how to operate from those who care for them. That is quite the responsibility for adults! Our children are a reflection of us—both our bad and our good.

If we curse and swear, so will they. If we act selfishly, so will they. If we speak badly about others, so will they. If we prioritize almost everything else before the Word of God, so will they. But if we watch what we say, if we speak well of others, if we look to help those around us, if we *"seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness"* (Mat. 6:33), they are likely to do the same. Your presence here today is almost certainly a reflection of the faithful example provided you by your parents or another influential Christian in your life. If we want the Church to continue, we can't leave it to someone else to do. The responsibility is yours and mine.

Children are watching, and they are listening. Once the Jerusalem children learned who Jesus was, they kept singing His praises and sharing the good news. The important religious leaders—the smart guys, the men of influence—rejected Jesus. The children believed in Him. As much as we need to be an example to our children, Jesus wants us to learn from their example too. He says, *"Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it"* (Mar. 10:15). And, *"unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Mat. 18:3).

That is our approach as we bow our heads and enter Holy Week again this year. Like the little children gathered around Jesus, we gather here to gladly hear and learn His holy Word and receive His blessed Sacraments. And we open our mouths to joyfully confess who He is and praise Him for His mercies.

We know why He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It was to win the victory over our sin and death. He knew what He would face. He knew that He would have to suffer both for those

who rejoiced at His coming and for those who despised Him. He went to the cross to pay for all sin, to pour out His holy blood so all wrongs would be washed away.

He shed His blood to cleanse you of all the times in your life when you behaved childishly, when you were a poor example to those in your care, when you failed to speak the truth, and when you doubted God's Word. God the Father does not see those sins on you anymore, because they were transferred to Jesus, and Jesus left them buried in the grave when He rose from the dead. The Holy Spirit connected you with Jesus' death and resurrection when you were baptized. That is when you became a child of your heavenly Father. That is when he adopted you to be His own, now and forever.

Each week, you come back here to your Father's house to hear this message. He speaks His promises through His Word, and you speak back to Him what you have heard. That's what happens in our Sunday School classes, our Catechism classes, and the Divine Service every week. We learn to participate in the holy conversation that God initiated with us sinners.

It is a holy conversation that can only be appreciated by those who have been given ears to hear it. Unbelievers hear what we say, and many of them mock us and laugh at us, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Some of them even try to silence our voices, because they hate what we say. But whatever is said about us or to us, we can reply with all childlike honesty and innocence that we are only telling what we have been told.

This is how we praise our Lord and Savior. We say back to Him and share with others what He has given to us. There is no better way to honor and glorify His name. And our dear Father loves to hear this faithful confession from the mouths of His dear children. "The children sang their praises, / The simplest and the best" (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #279, v. 1).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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