



Palm Sunday
10 April 2023

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

The streets of Jerusalem were full of pilgrims gathering for the festival. Old friends and new marriages and family additions would be the talk carried on the wind as people gathered from every corner of the countryside. What a festival this would be. Imagine Christmas Eve or Easter Sunday in the world we live in today. Yet in the time of Jesus – Passover was the big day to go to worship. How nice it feels when all the believers gather to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. The crowds aren't so bad. The inns and hotels are full of life. The streets come alive with the sounds of children and animals. Relatives, who haven't seen each other all year, have a chance to gather and spend time sharing stories of their days and passing on news from one side of the empire to the other. Even the presence of the Roman guards and army throughout Jerusalem are not so bad. It is a wonderful time to be in the holy city.

It sounds a little bit like the moment when most of us ventured out of our homes as the covid numbers began to recede and the opportunities to gather begin to increase. From isolation in fear to community with confidence for the most part. The city of Jerusalem is buzzing and somewhere in the city, two disciples - sent by Jesus, are tracking down a colt that has never been ridden. And the only instruction Jesus gives the disciples if someone asks them why they are “stealing” the donkey is to say, “the Lord needs it.” Yeah, good luck with that. But the disciples hurry off and find the colt and bring it to Jesus all the way from Jerusalem to the top of the Mount of Olives.

Today, you can visit the place where Jesus will begin his journey into Jerusalem. The chapel sits atop the Mount of Olives. And from the top of the temple mount where high priest and religious leaders sit and where Roman guards keep watch – one can look across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives and maybe, almost make out the small parade of disciples beginning their journey down the Mount of Olives into the Kidron Valley. But before the ragtag parade makes the journey from the Mount of Olives to the Temple Mount – Jesus will stop about half-way down the Mount of Olives and weep over the city. The moment is recorded in the book of Matthew: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” Today, you can stop at the chapel called “Dominus Flevit” which translates to “the Lord weeps.” And in this chapel shaped like a tear drop – you can gather for holy communion with the city of Jerusalem as the backdrop behind the altar.

It is such a contrast for us today – that we can celebrate Jesus entering the holy city to celebrate God's promise of hope where we hear the people who gathered to welcome Jesus shout the word “hosanna” meaning “save us” and in the same steps hear the words of today's disciples as they gather for worship, “the body of Christ broken for you.” We live in two kingdoms. One, an earthly kingdom where we suffer the rise and fall, the joy and sorrow of this life. And the other, a heavenly kingdom where we know only God's light and eternal life. Like Jesus today traveling the road of both hope and tragedy, we too follow in his footsteps trusting in God's promise of eternal life while tending the suffering of the now in this life.

If you are struggling to understand the now and the not yet, stop and share a moment of tending with Mary Ellen Comp or Joan Birner or Robin Gallo. Those who have suffered the power of death most fresh in our midst. Who walk with their grief now while they hold on to the promise of reunion with those they have loved in the promised life to come.

Jesus and the disciples make their way down the mountain. Entering the Kidron Valley they are forced to raise their eyes to the temple mount – where the temple of God shines like the sun itself. A reminder that no matter how deep the valley we walk, God invites us to look with hope to days to come. And as they begin the



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climb up the path to Jerusalem, more and more people begin to gather along the city walls. No doubt that Jesus was remembering the words of Psalm 122, “I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!” And again the words of Psalm 118, “Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord. The righteous shall enter through it.” These are the same words Pastor Tony, Edwin and I speak at the graveside of those we love. Where we stand with one foot grounded in this life, suffering the power of death, while our other footsteps confidently into the Kingdom of God where the power of death is no more. We know the valley of the shadow of death for what it is – a time of separation from those we love as they close their eyes to this life and open their eyes in the life to come. It would just be easier, if the separation was not so long and the journey of grief not so overwhelming.

It is time for another car in the Marien house. Which means that my wife and I have begun the journey down the mountain and into the valley of the shadow of death that is used car buying. As we get older, we get smarter. We do our research way before we venture into the minefield of car dealerships. We schedule appointments. We price check. We know the Carfax report by heart. When we believe we have done everything possible – we walk into the valley – we fear no evil because the Lord’s rod and staff comfort us. At least that is our hope. So yesterday, we began at one dealership where the two cars promised on the lot were actually on a lot not in Waukesha but in Menomonee Falls. And so we entered deeper into the valley – to first one dealership where when they drove the car out front for us to test drive – one tire was kinda flat and the tailgate would not open with the push button. It got more exciting when the miles on the website did not match the odometer reading. But what is 8000 additional miles driven? Too many for us. We drove next door and asked to drive the next car. Which the guy drove right up. It was everything we wanted – finally after 5 dealerships and 6 weeks of preparing – we had reached the mountaintop. This was the car. Mileage. Good. Color. Good. Year. Good. Heated seats. Good. Third row. Good. Sunroof. Good. Price. Good. All the things. Deeper into the valley we went. Pre-Approval letter in hand. Good. Better rate than they can possibly match. Good. The salesman disappears. He returns with the bill of sale. Additional warranty added cost. No, but thank you. OK. Good. He leaves. He comes back. Are you sure you do not want the additional warranty? And now I am beginning to fear the evil. Yes, we are sure. We want the car. WE do not need the warranty. He disappears again. He comes back with reinforcements. I look at my wife – she looks at me and now I wish I had that rod and staff to comfort me as I would use it to hit someone over the head. We can’t sell you the car without the warranty. Are you kidding? And we got up and walked out. No right color. No right price. No right year. No right make. No right model. No new car. And no warranty. Good. We drove back to Waukesha – I was in desperate need of a Starbucks. And the Starbucks was closed. We went to pick up our daughter at the skating rink and outside the skating rink was an ambulance and a firetruck. And I was like – you have got to be kidding. With a hastily parked car, I ran into the skating rink to watch a woman on a stretcher being wheeled out. And up out of the valley I ran. And all is well. At least for today.

The disciples have to be thinking the same thing. For all of the days they have traveled under the glaring judgment of the religious leaders, literally skirting the valley of the shadow of death. For all their doubting about who this Jesus is – they now are celebrated and welcomed by the people. Even the religious leaders dare not touch them with the crowds cheering. “Hosanna!” Hosanna? Save us! “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” When we reach the city wall, there are people everywhere. On each side of the street, the people are four and five thick waving their palm branches and shouting hosannas. People are leaning out windows and sitting on the ramparts of the city wall looking out to toward the Mount of Olives. Their voices raised in Hosannas! The sound bounces off the city walls and carries on the wind. Their arms



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raised in welcome—their hands waiving palm branches, and now what are they doing? Taking off their cloaks and laying them on the ground in front of Jesus and his procession. What do they see, what do they know that we do not?

Maybe, just maybe freedom is coming! Can Jesus be the one to deliver us? Can Jesus bring freedom! It is almost too much to hope for! He doesn't exactly look like a king—but God has done stranger miracles than this—and we do believe that Messiah is coming! Can it be this Jesus, an answer to a dream! One we have dreamed for so long! What a week this will be! The Son of God is here in the city. Passover just days away. What celebrating—what rejoicing—what miracles we will see this week! We will wait—for freedom is coming! Jesus is coming to save us! Freedom is coming! Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! This one who is coming—what are we hoping he will save us from? Who or what keeps us from being free? For each of us—that which binds us and blinds us—has a different name. And yet this Jesus who is coming promises to save us all from whatever breaks us, darkens our hearts, and makes us slaves. It is almost too much to hope for! And yet that is why we come. Again and again to our knees before God looking for comfort, for peace, for love, for forgiveness. Each of us are able to share the story of our life—where we have met sadness—where we have danced with joy—where we have found meaningless—hopelessness—loneliness. And in the midst of it all we find ourselves searching.

Searching for what distracts us from our pain. And yet we find nothing to satisfy our hunger, our need. And then we hear about this one who is coming. We hear that Jesus is coming! We hear that freedom is coming and we wonder—can this now be the answer? Is Jesus the one who will save us? Will Jesus be the one to set us free? Oh freedom is coming!

We dream of a kingdom! Where love is the law! We dream of a kingdom! Where grace and mercy conquers all! We dream of a kingdom! Where Jesus is king! Thanks be to God that Jesus is coming! Thanks be to God that freedom is coming and has come in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. And when I am reminded of this freedom that is coming. I believe this freedom sounds like this.

Oh Freedom! Oh Freedom! Oh Freedom! Freedom is coming! Oh, yes I know! Oh Freedom! Oh Freedom! Oh Freedom! Freedom is coming! Oh yes I know! Freedom is coming! Oh yes I know! Freedom is coming! Oh yes I know! And freedom's name is Jesus. Amen.