

Reflection: Freedom is Coming

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

The streets were full on that first Palm Sunday with the 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. 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 others 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.

What does the psalmist say? "I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." Certainly, today and the days ahead are days to be filled with rejoicing. We can almost taste the joy on the wind. And what is that sound—what is the news that was being passed around the table last evening. Something about freedom from Rome! Freedom is coming! A new king to bring freedom to God's chosen people. What was his name? We had heard it once or twice thrown around last night when the wine ran low. Jesus, wasn't it? Jesus of Nazareth. People are saying he is the Messiah! But it cannot be true. Would not the Messiah come after the feast of Passover—why would he come today? And how could God choose to send the Messiah from some out-of-the-way village like Nazareth. And this Jesus, we have heard other rumors about this one who is coming...He brings sight to the blind, eats with tax collectors and prostitutes, heals the lame, casts out demons, and just the other day—what did we hear—but that he had raised a man named Lazarus of Bethany from the dead. Give me a break. Everyone has an angle. Can this Jesus be any different? One more false prophet. One more distraction to pull us away from our worship of Yahweh. Such a waste of time. And yet there is a different feeling in the city this day. People are talking about this Jesus as if he really is a king.

The crowds are gathering at the gate by the city wall waiting for him to arrive. They are saying that the people who have gathered are carrying palm branches. Palm branches, a sign of royalty, for some common peasant from Galilee. They are crazy—they have to be. To put aside their preparations for Passover and instead choose to greet one more possibility in the midst of so many disappointments. But all we hear again and again in the market, "Jesus is coming," and in the square, "Jesus is coming," and even in the temple courts, "Jesus is coming!" And suddenly a cheer from one end of the city. And we run to find out what the commotion is about. And what do we hear! That word, "Hosanna!" Hosanna? Save us! "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Jesus is coming! Can you see him yet?" 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. What do they see? Something coming up the road towards the gate. It looks like a man with a crowd following behind him, and he is riding some kind of horse—no, it's too small for a horse, is that a donkey? A donkey—this can't be Jesus. And if it is—it certainly can't be the Messiah. How could the Messiah of God be brought into Jerusalem on the back of a beast of burden?

But the people! Look at the people! Their voices raised in Hosannas! The sound bounces off the city walls and carries on the wind. Their arms 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 that we do not? 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 Messiah 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. Alcohol, drugs, sex, shopping, social media, career, even, dare I say, coffee. 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? To most of us such an idea is no more than a dream. That brother against brother would find forgiveness. That child against parents could find reconciliation. Where separated husband and wife could find love buried so deep. This is the dream. Where peace between countries is the norm and not the hope. Where everyone shares in the freedom of the message of the Gospel. Where all peoples bow down to the holy throne of God. Where every knee will bend and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and King!

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 the kingdom we dream of is not just a dream but a reality! 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! It is for freedom that Christ has set us free! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. And when I am reminded of this freedom – I want to sing. 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.