

Sermon Text for April 5, 2020 - PALM SUNDAY

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Matthew 21:1-11

“From Palms to Passion”

So, how are you doing? I hope that this week you were able to experience a taste of normalcy as we sent out to each of you a Palm cross, the same exact ones that we use every year to celebrate Palm Sunday. The very same ones that we use every year to burn in order to begin our Lenten season on Ash Wednesday, as this year on Ash Wednesday, remember that on February 26, seems like an eternity ago, doesn't it? Today these Palms represent for us our unity, but they represent so much more than that as we find ourselves separated once again by distance. I pray that this Palm will continue to serve as a reminder of our unity and our faith in Jesus Christ who on this Sunday went from Palms to Passion.

There is a very clear liturgical movement normally on this Sunday. We begin the service with the choir processing into the sanctuary waving palm branches and there is celebration and festivity and joy. But as the service progresses the normal protocol is for the service to become more reflective of the passion, the pain, the suffering, the beatings, the trial, the crucifixion of our Savior which takes place a mere week from this day that we celebrate. There is supposed to be a very clear progression this Sunday from Palms, to passion.

We begin this Sunday celebrating Jesus as King. Yet we also remember that this is the last week of Jesus' life. Jesus today fulfills many prophecies as the Messiah who is to redeem the people of God. But he also fulfills the prophecies that we have as the sacrificial lamb who died to take away the sins of the world. Within our Savior today we find reflected the joy of eternal life which comes at a terrible cost, the cost of the life one who was perfect in every way.

Today, family, we will also celebrate communion together which also contains elements of palms and passion. Today I want you to think about how do we normally celebrate communion and what is the tenor, what is the mood of the congregation and the church when we celebrate together? Without a doubt it is very contemplative, but does it lean towards passion, or does it embrace the celebration that we find in the palms. This Sunday communion will be different from any other time that we have ever taken in as a congregation, and that comes with challenges both with logistics, and with theology. We will touch upon those, but I want you to focus on the celebration and the passion that we find ourselves immersed in this Sunday.

READ SCRIPTURE

As we look at our Old Testament Scripture this is one of those Scriptures called a suffering servant Scripture which we find in Isaiah. There are 4 of them and each of them on this side of history we call them as types and examples of who Jesus, our Savior was going to be like. They are meant to remind us that the messiah that we accept as having come in the flesh in Jesus Christ was one who was humble and willing to take abuse and suffering as a servant. Look at vs.6, we read that this servant gave his back to those who struck me. We know that Jesus was flogged, whipped in the presence of Pilate and the Gospel of John captures that vividly. So in a sense when we look at our Old Testament Scripture we are beginning with the passion of Christ and then when we look at our New Testament Scripture we look at the Palms of Christ, the celebration.

We find ourselves in the Gospel of Matthew. Each Gospel tends to highlight a certain aspect of who Jesus was. John focuses on Jesus as God. Luke focuses on Jesus as a servant, Mark focuses on Jesus as a human, and Matthew, the one that we saw today, focuses on Jesus as a King. Now all of those attributes are true and all of them reflect the person and the presence of Jesus in his life and death and resurrection as a whole. But today we find ourselves in Matthew and we see Jesus described over and over again as a King. The Palms that are waved were normally saved for a King riding into a city in triumph.

Look at Zechariah 9:9 where we read: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” This is way back in the Old Testament and Matthew clearly takes from Zechariah who was describing the celebratory entrance of the king after a military victory. Jesus, we read in vs.4, rides into Jerusalem and in him doing so, he is fulfilling Scripture. We were told that this was going to happen, and it is now happening. The palms, the celebration, the joy at victory, the ecstasy of triumph begins our journey on Palm Sunday. But for Jesus’ disciples, who were going ahead and before him, they were warned that these celebrations were going to be short lived.

Look at Matthew 20:17-19 and Jesus is speaking to his disciples preparing them for what was to come. He already set the stage for his passion. Even while they knew the end of the story, they were still equipped with what they needed to bring Jesus into Jerusalem. Jesus sends the disciples to get the donkey and found it exactly as Jesus had said. So we find that Jesus has prepared his disciples here in this Scripture both for the passion that was to come, and for the Palms that were a part of his fulfilling of Scripture as the king that the Lord had sent to save his people from their sins.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem as this king we read in vs.10 that the whole city was in turmoil. It is the same word that can describe an earthquake at the gravesite, or the storm on the sea that Jesus calms, or, as we read at his birth in Matthew 2:3, it can describe a state of mind when we are confronted with the Lord of Lords and we are not open to his presence in our lives. When Jesus enters Jerusalem the whole city is shook by his presence, much more the lives of the individuals who did not understand that these palms were to be followed with a passion which would cause all the disciples to flee, even though they had been told what was to come.

The son of David enters David's city, but the only throne he finds is a cross. On that cross was his just title. The King of the Jews. Just as Jerusalem was shaken at the news of his birth, the city eventually sides again with the Herods of this world who try to keep the status quo for their benefit. This is where we find ourselves today. Waving palms even while we are face to face with a tragedy and a reality that can only speak to passion.

Brothers and sisters, how are you doing? We are now in a time of passion, even as we celebrate our eternal life in Jesus Christ. While we are in this time of passion it is so important for us to recognize what brings us together and what keeps us together, and that is our Savior Jesus Christ. And what more powerful symbol are we able to lift up and celebrate than the communion that is set before us. You need to know that we had an incredibly fruitful conversation at session in regards to taking part in this virtual communion. Our denomination provides examples of options that congregations can take during this time of being apart from each other in regards to communion.

One option is what is called a time of sacramental fasting, which means that during this time our sacraments of communion and baptism be put on hold because we are in this time of passion, we in this time of separation that we have not chosen, but that has been chosen for us. This sacramental fast would allow us to focus on the passion in which we find ourselves. Brothers and sisters, we are in a season of passion. At our Bible Study on Thursday we spoke of Psalms of lament and how it is important that this is part of our repertoire. Lament is an absolutely acceptable way to approach our Lord. But don't live there, don't dwell there, it is a season of our life and it should not be the primary defining feature of who we are. Almost all the Psalms of lament within that same Psalm transitions to thanksgiving and celebration, to Palms, for what God has done.

Even as we live in this time of passion, I think as a congregation we need a little bit of palm, celebration. This time of communion for us has to be a celebration for us today and a

confirmation for us today for what Paul tells us in Romans 8. What does Paul tell us in Romans 8:31 and following you ask? Well let's see:

A very good friend of mine from college, we graduated together, I had just emailed him last week so we were in constant communication, I heard yesterday that he died from the coronavirus. He was the first tech reported for the AP, lived in NYC, was a marathon runner. We are living in times of passion, without a doubt, and it is personal. But as we live this time of passion, as we face this holy week that is coming up, know that you are more than conquerors in Jesus Christ. The Palms, the celebration, the victory of our king always overcomes the wages of sin. Amen.