

Matthew 21:1-19 (Palm Sunday)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
April 10, 2022

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Another name for Palm Sunday is Passion Sunday. These two names, Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday, reflect two different traditions in the church, both of which you experienced this morning. First, there's the procession with palm branches, which goes back to 4th century Jerusalem. It was introduced into the western church in the 9th century when pilgrims to the Holy Land brought the custom home from their travels. The second tradition is the reading of St. Matthew's account of our Lord's passion, the account of Christ's suffering and death. The tradition of reading the passion account according to St. Matthew is included in the oldest liturgies of the western church. Today both traditions live on. They work together to show the contrasting character of this day. On the one hand, we have Christ entering Jerusalem, welcomed as the king of Israel with the waving of palm branches. On the other hand, we have Christ betrayed, suffering, crucified, and buried: the passion of Christ. There's the King of the Jews entering Jerusalem, and then there's the King of the Jews hanging on the cross. The king who enters Jerusalem on a donkey, like King Solomon, and the king who is crowned with thorns. Two contrasting ideas of what a king looks like, but the same king: our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jerusalem is the city that "kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it" (Matt 23:37), at least that's what Jesus says. Yet on Palm Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem to the shouts of those welcoming their king: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" The whole city was stirred up! Who could that be, causing all the commotion? "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." Jesus enters

Jerusalem as a prophet and as the king's son, but remember, Jerusalem is the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.

It could have been any city, though, not just Jerusalem. It could have been any of us. "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own people, and His own people did not receive Him" (John 1:10). We are citizens of that city. Like the people welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem, we welcome Jesus. But do we know what we're getting ourselves into? Do we know what we are in for when we follow this king and not another? Perhaps not. Perhaps we believe Jesus will give us an easier life, or at least a way to cope. We hope Jesus will help us get what we want. Or we welcome him because that's what the crowd is doing. Like the people in Jerusalem, we think Jesus is here on our terms. We want a god made in our own image.

But Jesus is not here to give us an easier life or a way to cope. Instead, He says: "whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matt 10:38). Jesus is not here to give us what we want. Instead, He says: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24). Jesus is not here to make us fit in with the crowd. Instead, He says: "you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt 10:22). Jesus did not come to make your life easier, to give you what you want, or to make you fit in. Jesus entered Jerusalem, Jesus entered our world, to take our sins and offenses upon Himself and to die on the cross in our place. Jesus came to do the will of God the Father, which led Him by way of suffering and the cross to enter into His glory. It's in the forgiveness Christ won for us on the cross that our burden is removed, where God gives us all good things, and where we become part of a real community. But it's on God's terms, not ours. Through Baptism, our life becomes the life of our LORD, a life of self-denial

and suffering. We reflect on this during the season of Lent and especially now during Holy Week. By seeing what our Savior has done for us, we learn to mortify our flesh, to drown the old Adam, and to kill our sinful desires. We learn that the Christian life is a lonely way, a way of denial, the way of the cross.

The crowds were mistaken when they welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as their king. They were mistaken about what the Kingdom of Jesus looks like. Jesus does not come on our terms; He does not even come on His own terms. Jesus does the will of the Father, and the will of the Father is that suffering and the cross come before glory. The passion of Christ comes before the joy of Easter. And so it is in the Christian life as well. In self-denial we imitate our Lord in his suffering and death, following Him wherever He leads. By the grace of God we endure to the end, knowing that whoever suffers with Christ here will be glorified with Him there. Then we will join those in the New Jerusalem, as pictured in the Book of Revelation, that great multitude no one can number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the lamb!’” (Rev 7:9-10). This Holy Week, let us take up our cross and follow our king into Jerusalem to die, in order that we too may be raised with Him to live in His kingdom forever. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.