

See, Your King Comes to You

I. Being in very nature God

II. He humbled himself

²⁸After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰“Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³²Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”^u

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

Have you ever wondered why it is that for centuries, Christians have been observing a day known as Palm Sunday? Why is that? Is it that the church is really partial to one particular kind of tree branch? I mean, the Bible refers to all kinds of different species of trees. Why don't we have a Olive Sunday? Or a Sycamore Fig Sunday? Why just Palm Sunday?

Now, maybe you're thinking, “We celebrate Palm Sunday, because something very important happened on that day in Jesus’ life.” Yeah, what was it? And why is it worth celebrating? I mean, it's not like on this day Jesus performed this amazing miracle that absolutely blew everybody's socks off. It's not like Jesus preached a sermon that was just packed full of wisdom for us to meditate on today. It's not like Palm Sunday highlights Jesus’ active obedience. You know, like God had commanded us all to ride a donkey, but we’ve failed to do that perfectly, so Jesus did it for us. And it's really not part of Jesus’ passive obedience. It's not like Jesus suffered and died on that donkey. So, what is the significance of this day of the church year?

The answer is simply this. Palm Sunday is the beginning of the most important week in the history of mankind. More than that, Palm Sunday kind of sets the stage for what is to come. On Palm Sunday, Jesus reveals his true identity. He allows the crowds to acknowledge him as a king. But then he doesn't do what the people expect a king to do. Rather than ruling with a show of force, he does just the opposite. He humbles himself. He rides in on a donkey. He allows himself to be arrested and beaten and nailed to a cross, all so that in the end he can win the victory over sin and the grave forever. That’s what Jesus showed on Palm Sunday. He showed

that he is a king who wins, by surrendering.

You realize, 500 years before Jesus was born, the prophet had already foretold this event. The prophet Zechariah said, *“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey.”* 30 years after Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the Apostle Paul described what happened with the words of our epistle reading today, namely, *Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. (Phil. 2:6-7)*

Today, we are going to use those two passages to help us more fully understand what was going on on that first Palm Sunday as we consider this theme: Christian,

See, your King Comes to You

He comes, I. (Being) in very nature God.

II. He (comes as one who) humbled himself.

First, he comes, being in very nature God. Now, someone might look at Luke's account of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and say “I don't know where this account shows that Jesus is in very nature God. I mean, does a person have to be divine in order to be able to ride a donkey?” No. Unless, of course, it's a donkey that's never been ridden before, which is what Luke says this donkey was. Have you ever tried riding a horse, or a mule, or a donkey that's not yet been broken? Chances are, you are going to get bucked off. But not Jesus. Jesus is the Lord over all creation. Jesus is the one who told a storm to be still and a dead man to come out of the grave. And so, when Jesus climbs on the back of this unbroken animal, it doesn't buck. It doesn't bolt. It doesn't balk, even when it's forced to walk through a crowd of people singing and shouting and waving palm branches in its face. You might say that's a miracle. It's proof that Jesus is, in very nature, God.

But on this Palm Sunday, Jesus not only proves that he's all powerful. He proves that he's all knowing. Remember how Luke's account begins with Jesus telling his disciples to go into the city where they will find a colt with its mother? And Jesus tells them that when the owner objects to them taking this animal, they are to simply say, “The Lord needs it,” and the owner will give it to them. Which is exactly what happened! How did Jesus know all those things ahead of time? Because, as Paul says, Jesus is, in very nature, God.

But there is one more piece of evidence in this account to support the fact that Jesus is God. It's in Jesus' perfect fulfillment of Scripture. Remember, the prophet Zechariah said, *“Your king comes to you, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* It's as if the prophet was saying, “This is how you will identify the Messiah. He'll be the one not just riding on a donkey. He'll be riding on a baby donkey. So, on Palm Sunday, what did Jesus do? He, in effect, flashed his Messiah ID. He rode into town on a baby donkey. And make no mistake, the people didn't miss it. They realized exactly what Jesus was saying about himself; and they reacted accordingly. Luke tells us, *When Jesus came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles that they had seen* (miracles which included Jesus healing the blind beggar just days before and raising Lazarus from the grave before that). These crowds burst into songs of praise. *“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”* The other gospels record them as saying, *“Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!”* In fact, if you listen carefully, you can hear the crowds echoing the voices of the angels on Christmas night with the words, *“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.”*

Even if not everybody in the crowd realized exactly what kind of King Jesus would be,

even if some of them were expecting more of a political Messiah, the fact is, they were acclaiming Jesus as the one sent by God, the one promised in the pages of Holy Scripture. They acknowledged that this Jesus of Nazareth was worthy of their worship and praise. And notice, Jesus didn't disagree. He accepts their praise. In fact, when the Pharisees object to the praise that the crowds are directing toward Jesus, when they, in effect, accuse Jesus of the sin of blasphemy by allowing the people to treat him like he's God, when the Pharisees say, "*Teacher, rebuke your disciples,*" what was Jesus' response? Jesus said, "*I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.*"

In other words, Jesus is saying, the praise that these people are directing to me is perfectly appropriate. In fact, if they don't praise me as God, the rest of creation will! How did the Psalmist put it? "*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19:1)* And again, "*Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them: let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.*" (Psalm 96:12)

My friends, as you look at the events that transpired on that first Palm Sunday, do you see how they support Paul's statement to the Philippians that Jesus was, in very nature, God? Jesus had knowledge that only God could have. He exerted power over nature like only God can. And he accepted the praise that only God deserves. Jesus was, and still is, in very nature, God.

And yet, even though Jesus is the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-glorious God of the universe, yet for your sake and mine, what did Jesus do? He humbled himself. Yes, on Palm Sunday, we hear the holy writers say, See, your King Comes to you. Yes, I. Being in very nature God. Yet still, II. He humbled himself.

Listen again to St. Paul's words in Philippians, chapter 2: *In your relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used for his own advantage;* (in other words, Jesus didn't use his divine power to make his life on earth easier for himself. When he was out in the wilderness for 40 days without food, he didn't snap his fingers to create a big Mac to eat.) *Rather, Paul says, (Jesus) made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (Phil. 2:5-7)*

You maybe realize that with those words, Paul is referring to what is sometimes called Jesus' incarnation, when the second person of the Godhead took on a second nature, when the divine also became human, in the person of Jesus Christ. But then St Paul goes on to describe what that God-Incarnate Christ did. Paul says that, *and being found in appearance as a man, he (that is, Jesus) humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Notice those words, "he humbled himself." If you think back to catechism class, you maybe remember Jesus' state of humiliation. It refers to that period of time when Jesus, even though he always was, and always will be, God, even though by nature he has all the power and glory of God, even though every once in a while he would show people a little bit of his divine power by doing a miracle, or a little bit of his divine glory by lighting up like the sun on the Mount of Transfiguration, still from the time of his conception in the Virgin Mary to the moment he burst from the tomb on Easter morning—during that entire time, Jesus set aside the full use of his divine power and glory. It's why, during that period, he endured things like hunger and thirst and pain. It's during that time that Jesus allowed himself to be arrested, tortured and nailed to a cross. It's during that time that he endured the most horrific kind of death known to man, namely, death by crucifixion.

And why would Jesus, the very Son of God, do all that? Why would the one who had all the power and glory in the world, the one who could have destroyed all his enemies with a flick

of his finger, why would that God take on the role of a servant, to allow himself to be crucified, die, and be buried? The answer is, he did it because he loves you, more than you will ever know. You see, God wanted you to have what you do not have by nature. God wanted you to have what God has by nature, and that's holiness, and a life in heaven that will never end. And so, God gave you those things by trading places with you. God left his throne of glory in order to become a slave, so that you could become the heir to the throne. How did Saint Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 8? *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

My friends, that's what Palm Sunday's all about. Palm Sunday is a video clip of a king, climbing on to a lowly beast of burden, in fact, becoming the ultimate beast of burden, carrying the load of our sins all the way to the cross, so that we can be set free to live our lives in joyful anticipation of a life in heaven where we will gather with the saints around the throne of God and say, *"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev. 5:12)*

So, the only question that remains is, "Do the events of Palm Sunday have any significance, any application for our lives today?" Absolutely. St Paul tells us exactly what it means for our lives today when he says in the very first words of our epistle reading today, *"In your relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God...humbled himself.*

What does that mean, to have the mindset of Christ? It means taking on every day with the thought, not "What's in it for me?", but rather "How can I humbly serve the needs of others?" Here at church maybe it's by serving as a greeter, an usher, or in the coffee cafe. At home, maybe it's being the first to make the bed or the first to put down the phone, or simply the first to say "I'm sorry. I was wrong."

But here's the way to do that with a Christlike mindset. Just as surely as Jesus knew exactly who he was, exactly where he stood with his Father in heaven, so do you. By God's grace you know who you are. By virtue of the New Man that God is planted in you through the washing with water and the word. dressed in the righteousness that is yours through faith, you are a redeemed child of God. You are an heir of heaven. And from that position of absolute security, knowing where you stand with God, you are in the perfect position to do what Jesus did. And that's to put others ahead of yourself. To serve one another in love, just as Jesus did as he rode the donkey into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. Dear Christian, your donkey is waiting, for Jesus' sake. Amen.