

PALM SUNDAY  
March 29, 2015

***Jesus says, "I Am Your Servant!"***

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Most people like the idea of being important. Some want to be celebrities - a movie star, a great singer, or maybe a well know comedian who gets all the laughs from crowds of people. There are those who desperately want to be powerful - movers and shakers of society who get certain things done for recognition and honor. Still others would like to be known for brilliant ideas - ideas that change the world. And then there are those who would like to be known for accomplishing some great thing - an accomplishment that separates them from the average. I doubt that there would be a multitude of people who would love the idea of being a servant.

Do you remember the disciples? They are frequently disputing among themselves to determine which of them was considered to be the greatest (Luke 22:21). The apostle Paul writes, "Love . . . does not boast (1 Cor. 14:4). There is that part of us that is full of self-love - only in it for the self. What Paul says is a hard truth for this world to swallow. We reason, "There must be a first and last, a greatest and those who are not so great." And then we hear the words that come from the mouth of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Luke (22:25-28):

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

Those last words sum up the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He was among us "as one who serves." Jesus says, **"I Am Your Servant!"**

It really blows the mind doesn't it? Jesus is the Creator of the Universe! He comes to serve his creation. He comes to serve us! This is Palm Sunday, and the heart of Palm Sunday is this: Jesus Christ, our servant, willingly marches into Jerusalem to take up the cross in order to die. It is on the cross that he forever nails every sin of every sinner. There he serves us unto death so that we might have the assurance of eternal life! Luther says in the hymn *Dear Christians, One and All*: "His royal pow'r disguised he bore, A servants form, like mine, he wore." He is a king in disguise in order to make for himself a kingdom.

In the passion history, Palm Sunday takes us to the fact that we are only moments away from Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate. And Pilate asks that ever so familiar question, "Are you the king of the Jews (Jn. 28:33)?" And then those words of Jesus that stand and glare at us - any of us who have sacrificed so much time and effort for the comfort and love of this world - those words of Jesus: "My kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 28:36)."

And he rides into Jerusalem a servant and a king. He rides on a colt, the foal of donkey. Fred H. Wight tells us in his book on *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*:

The donkey is used as a symbol of peace-times. The horse has usually symbolized times of war, but the donkey, times of peace. In Old Testament times this was especially true from the days of King Solomon. This fact helps to explain the words of the prophet about the Messiah that were fulfilled in the triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem . . . Here the use by Jesus of the donkey was to signify that He was Prince of Peace, rather than Captain of an army, when He entered the Holy City.

Here he is! Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, king of kings, walks the earth and becomes our servant serving up an eternal kingdom. He goes to Jerusalem, riding in humility in order to save. He saves us from or sins and gives us the hope of a glorious future in a place that is not of this world. He is Jesus the Savior! He is the Prince of Peace who has come to bring an end to our enmity with God!

So many people have so many ideas about the person and work of Christ. Some want Jesus to be nothing more than a good man who had a lot of good ideas and laws to help mankind have a happy world. Others think of Jesus as being a "happy-go-lucky" type of a guy who winks at sin. Many want a Jesus that doesn't require much beyond knowing a few interesting facts about him. Jesus will not conform to our own twisted desires.

If we are really going to understand who it is that is riding on a donkey, we must begin with an understanding of our ourselves, and then move on to an understanding of him. There is a harsh truth that none of us want to hear. He has become our servant to help us out of our horrible mess of sin and death. He did not come to give us a list of things to do in order to live a happy life down here - to create a kingdom on earth. He did not enter into our existence in order to fulfill our felt needs and wink at all the things we say and do against God's Word. He has come into this world because of our rebellion, and because we deserve death and hell.

We take a good hard look at the commandments and what do we see? We have not loved God, we have not loved his Word, we have not honored our parents. We have lied, hated, cheated, stolen, coveted, and the list goes on. And lest we forget, these are merely symptoms of the greater reality of sin. We are disconnected from God - curved in toward ourselves. We are his enemy, and we deserve to be defeated. But, when Jesus rides into the city of Jerusalem, one can almost hear an echo of the words he once said in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Jesus says to Pilate, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." And what is the truth? The truth is that our enmity with God is over in Jesus Christ. Our Savior has come to set everything straight. The kingdom are all those who believe. It is not a kingdom of power and glory, at least for now. It is a heavenly kingdom where Jesus reigns forever. It consists of people who are at peace with God by faith in Jesus Christ. But this peace has been established in such a way that it has gone against all of human wisdom.

Before Palm Sunday, he tells the disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to suffer and die. He must go to Jerusalem. The disciples have a hard time with this. It just doesn't fit their expectations. But, he is the Savior of the world, the only one who can save us, which brings us to who he is. This one riding on the donkey is both God and Man. He is our perfect substitute, and the only one able to live a perfect life so that his life is able to reach us and make us perfect forever. He has done everything right, continues to do everything right, and now comes to Jerusalem to go the cross in order to suffer our hell. He goes to the cross so that we might have the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Luther writes:

In His kingdom, in which He is King and Lord, He does not teach how we should till the soil, plow, sow, reap, attend to household matters, collect money, wage war, govern land and people, but places that in charge of worldly kings and lords . . . For Christ in His kingdom teaches us through His Word that we are poor, lost sinners, condemned to death, subject to the devil; but that He, through His death and blood, has delivered us from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, in order that by faith in Him we should be justified and saved.

Yes, the peace of God is about poor, lost sinners, condemned to death, subject to the devil being delivered by the holy, innocent, precious blood of Jesus Christ. That is the heart of Palm Sunday. It is written in Psalm 118, "O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs is hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar (25-27)."

You can probably tell from hearing this Psalm, that this is what the people were quoting when Jesus made his way into Jerusalem. Not only that, but it was the last hymn that the disciples sang at Passover. What hits us right between the eyes is what the closing verse says. The "festal procession" leads "to the horns of the altar." And that sums up everything today! The Savior on the donkey is riding up to the altar to be burned by the fire that we deserve for all of our sins. That horns of the altar point to the strength of God for us, and it is our strength in him. It is in the festal procession that leads to Calvary that Jesus says, **"I Am Your Servant!"** And it is what leads us to serve - to love - one another.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott