

*PALM SUNDAY*

*March 20, 2016*

*John 6:66-67: “God’s Question:  
Do You Want to Go Away As Well?”*

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered into Jerusalem to fulfill the words of the prophet Zechariah (9:9): “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” He did not come on a horse in battle, but came to reveal the very heart of God. Again, Zechariah writes, “. . . because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the water-less pit (9:11).”

Jesus was unwavering, unshakeable, determined, resolved. He was the Lamb of God who willingly went to the slaughter in order to give himself for you and me. The Father gave his one and only Son, his everything, in order that we might receive everything through him. As it says in Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” Christ sheds his blood to forgive our sins and set us free from the punishment of eternal death and the fires of hell. In the giving of himself we receive paradise. No wonder, then, that the prophet says “rejoice!” and “shout aloud!”

What a day it had to be when Jesus entered into the city of Jerusalem. Hundreds and thousands of people gathered for the Passover. People stirred up by the commotion surrounding this figure who was slowly making his way into the great city. You can almost smell the dust, hear the cries, see the palm branches, and touch the colt and the rider as he goes by. Matthew writes: “And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, ‘Who is this?’ And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee (Matthew 21:10-11).”

Indeed! “Who is this?” More than that, “who is this Jesus to me?” What does this man riding on the colt have to do with me, and how shall I receive him when he makes his way into the city of my life? One of the problems with palm branches is that once you cut them from the tree, they don’t last. They eventually dry up, shrivel, get brown, and you finally throw them away. The problem with Palm Sunday is that the enthusiasm of the crowds didn’t last that long. The “Hosanna!” fades away. It wasn’t long before crowds of people found themselves shouting “Crucify Him!” And it was all because Jesus just wouldn’t fit into their expectations. They sang a song, and he just wouldn’t dance. He went after their sin. Instead of promising them a kingdom down here, he gave them forgiveness of sins and a kingdom not of this world. Therefore, we see in the crowds at Jerusalem an extremely shallow relationship with Jesus. They want to know what Jesus is going to do for them, and they exchange the truth for a lie.

This was not the first time that something like this had happened to Jesus. At one point in his ministry, our Lord fed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two small fish. And the crowds wanted to make Jesus into their bread king. It says in the gospel of John, “perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself (John 6:15).” During the night, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee and the crowd searched him out. He talked to them about his mission to be the living Bread from heaven, and promised that all those who would believe in him would have food that endures to eternal life. And we are told, “After this many of his disciples

turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" It is a very important question as we see the vast majority of people turning away from him throughout human history. Many, who had eaten the free lunch, turned away because they were not going to get what they really wanted from Jesus.

When we examine all of this, it begs the question: What do you really want from Jesus? And, when you don't get what you might expect, or what you think you should get, or when our Savior doesn't deliver in the way you want him to save you, **"Do you Want to Go Away as Well?"** And so, once again, we are confronted with another one of God's questions. It's a hard question to ask; especially, when you don't think that Jesus is "keeping his end of the deal."

Jesus is everything. He offered himself as man's Substitute, and carried in his body and soul the burden of man's sins. He overcame death and the devil for mankind. To accomplish these things he left his heavenly glory, took upon Himself the form of a servant, endured poverty and shame, and finally humbled himself unto death, even the death on the cross. By his work of redemption, which he sealed with his resurrection from the dead, he has secured for all mankind heavenly blessings, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, righteousness before God, eternal life.

The sad truth is that the vast majority of people will have absolutely nothing to do with this wonderful Savior. Such live and die without Christ and his saving work. It is even more sad that many who for a time were His blessed disciples later leave him, turn their backs on him, and walk down the broad road of destruction. In our text for this morning we see this ever present danger. We must examine our walk with the Savior and determine if our perspective is focused in the right way or is it blurred like the people of long ago who had their fill from the loaves and fish. These people of the past did not accept the real mission of Jesus Christ. They were following him for all the wrong reasons.

Look at how easy it is to fall into the same trap. We are also in danger. In fact, I would suggest that many of us struggle with this all the time. Deep down inside we try to construct a Jesus who will make our journey an easy one, a fulfilling one. We want him as long as he doesn't get in the way.

And the truth is that Jesus can get in the way of everything we strive for in this messed up life. Jesus says, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32)." And here's the rub. This was why he was rejected. Jesus states, "the world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil (John 7:7)." And isn't it amazing? All Jesus wants to give is eternal life. As he himself says, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45)." The sinful flesh does not want to hear these words of 1 John 3:8, "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." But, while the sinful flesh does not want to hear such things, the forgiven sinner does and earnestly desires for sin to go away. And, the Lord Jesus Christ says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul (Matt. 16:24-26)?"

All of that being said, listen again to the words of Jesus and consider them as if they are completely directed to you this morning. **“Do you Want to Go Away as Well?”**

On that occasion long ago Peter responded for the Twelve: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God (John 6:68-69).” May God grant us the strength to make his answer our own.

Today, Palm Sunday, we gather here with palms in our hands, ready to herald Jesus, not as a king and savior who preserves and reigns to forever preserve this fallen world, but as the Christ - the Son of the living God - the King of kings who reigns forever in holiness. May we never react as the crowd in Jerusalem did. May our shallow understanding make way for a very deep understanding of all that Christ has done for us with an appreciation of what it is that he really wants to give. He is the King who would make us into a kingdom that will never perish, spoil, or fade. With that, we will not turn away. He is the Holy One of God. He is our everything!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott