

# PALM SUNDAY/SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

“What Kind of King is This Jesus?”

April 16/17, 2011

Today is one of those Sundays in the church year that seems to have more than one theme. I mean, on the one hand it is Palm Sunday with all its emphasis on Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem as the crowds wave their palm branches before him and shout, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And yet, on the other hand, it's also the Sunday of the Passion with its emphasis on Christ's suffering and death as the crowds now shout, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Of course, those who have been around the church for a while may remember that it used to be just Palm Sunday. But that all changed some years ago due, in part, to a changing perception on the part of some about the importance of Holy Week services. The fact is that there are a growing number of people who don't attend any of the Holy Week services. And so, because it's important to hear about Christ's suffering and death, both the Gospel for Palm Sunday and part of the Passion Narrative have been combined on this one Sunday so that neither emphasis will be overlooked or neglected.

And yet, in the end, there was and still is only one real theme for this first day in the most holy week of the church year – the theme that was expressed in the last verse of the hymn we just sang, “Ride on, ride on, in majesty, in lowly pomp ride on to die, bow your meek head to mortal pain, then take, O Christ, your power and reign!”

And so for a few moments this day, let us consider this theme with the question of what kind of king is this Jesus?

Well, the first thing we can say is that he's no ordinary king. In days gone by, ordinary kings would often parade through the streets of their capitols dressed in their best uniforms astride some beautiful horse with the spoils of war close at hand. They were kings who came to impress. But not this Jesus. He enters the streets of Jerusalem dressed in the only clothes he had, riding a lowly, borrowed donkey, come not with the spoils of war but rather come to offer himself as the sacrifice of war.

This war, of course, is no ordinary war either. It's not simply a conflict between nation and nation – it's bigger than that – it's a conflict between God and man – a conflict that began at the beginning of time – a conflict that had the sin of mankind at its heart – a conflict that man, on his own, could never win – a conflict that only God could and would win. But it's not a conflict that God chose to win for himself – rather it's a conflict He chose to win for man.

And so He sent this extraordinary king – God's only Son – the one the Bible calls the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, to fight the war for us. He came as a king, but he said of himself, “not to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many.”

And that's exactly what he did. That's the point of his passion. Far from being just another story of another innocent victim put to death at the hands of evil men, it is the story of a King who willingly offers himself up to death on a cross so that all people might win the war and, in the end, be saved. And in that we see that the passion story is not really a story of defeat at all but rather a story of victory.

This King came not to proclaim victory for himself but rather victory for all those who believe and trust in him as their personal Lord and Savior – for all those who, by faith, receive him as their King and who live under him in his kingdom.

And this same King who came some two thousand years ago, comes again today – meek and lowly, in Word and Sacrament. He comes not to impress but to serve. He comes to serve all those who will receive him by faith. He comes as one who has won the most important war of all time and has won it for us. He comes as one who has destroyed the power of sin, death and the devil himself, and brings us the spoils of that war – forgiveness, life and salvation.

And what is our response to such a king? Will it be that of the fickle crowd who laid their palms before him one day only to cry for his crucifixion a few days later? Or will it be something more? No less than the very giving of our lives to him will do and, in that, our love and loyalty as well.

Do you remember what Martin Luther once said was a fitting response to such a king? In his explanation to the second article of the Apostles' Creed, he said that we should “serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity.”

Today is the first day of Holy Week – a week devoted to focusing our attention once again on the very heart of the Gospel – on the king who comes to die for us. I invite you to walk the way of the cross with him again this week – to go to the upper room with him, to stand at the foot of the cross with him, and to see the place where they laid him – and, in that, to see and hear once again what this king did for you and come to a fuller and richer and deeper appreciation of what kind of king this Jesus is to you.

Let us pray: Almighty God, as we recall how your Son and our Savior Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem in triumph and was proclaimed king by those who spread their palm branches before him, may we who bring our palms and our praises before him this day, receive him once again as our king and may we ever follow him in the way that leads to eternal life. For his name's sake we pray. Amen.