

Palm Sunday – Year A – April 17, 2011 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Based on Zechariah 9:9,10 - written by Pastor Paul Horn

“Jesus: both Defeated and Victorious.”

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! But before he could rise to victory he had to suffer the defeat of death. Through faith in his death and resurrection he has given us the victory. May God grant that we listen with attentive ears and take to heart his words this morning. Amen.

We had a tradition at Seminary where I went to school when a classmate got married. At the wedding reception we would grab the new groom, sit him down on a chair and hoist the chair up in the air and dance around the room singing an Jewish song “Hava Nagila.” Let us rejoice! It was the appropriate time and setting to sing a song like that, a time to rejoice! This young man had found a wife to keep him on the straight and narrow while he studied for the pastoral ministry. I bring this up because Zechariah uses the same Hebrew words in our lesson. “Hava Nagila!” “Let us rejoice, daughters of Jerusalem!”

We have to understand why Zechariah wrote those words, and when and to whom he wrote those words. Zechariah lived 400 years before Jesus was born, at a time in Israel’s history when the people were returning from a 70 year exile in Babylon. The exiles were rebuilding the temple and the city walls of Jerusalem. A time to rejoice! In chapter nine, the prophetic word of LORD predicted the defeat of Israel’s enemies. Time for rejoicing! Israel’s enemies had just kept them captive for 70 years! Then he continues with the verses from our lesson with a prediction of the coming of the Messiah King.

Now we have to understand the historical context of this text in Jesus’ day. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the people were no doubt thinking of this prophecy. You have to remember that the Romans had been ruling over Israel. The last time they were an independent nation was during the days of the Hasmoneans, better known as the family of Mattathias, or as the people of Israel called them, the Maccabees, a Hebrew word that meant “the hammer.” This family of rebels struck the enemy with hammer like blows and in 142 BC in their revolt against Antiochus IV brought freedom to Jerusalem.

This is what the people were looking for. If Jesus was the Messiah, he could bring that freedom. They had seen him flex his power before. They saw it in his miracles. They heard the authority in his voice when he preached and taught.

However, if they had paid closer attention to the way Jesus entered the holy city... there were no commanders and generals who followed him, but fishermen. There were no war horses or chariots, but he came riding on a donkey. There were no mighty warrior soldiers, but women who trailed behind him.

If they had paid close attention to this prophecy, they would have read that the Messiah would come to **take away the chariots and the war-horses** from Israel. **The battle bow would be broken.** He would **proclaim peace.** There was no mention of hammers, or bloodshed or battle; only humility, and peace, and defeat.

That's exactly what the people of Jerusalem saw five days later. There was display of kingly pomp, but they saw Jesus with kingly robes, matted with his own blood. There was no war cry, but a cry of death and suffering. They would not see their enemies hanging on crosses, executed for their tyrannical misdeeds, but Jesus they would see hanging derelict upon the cross, defeated by his enemies, wearing no crown of gold, but a crown of thorns. This was not the Messiah King they had expected, not the one whom they had welcomed on Palm Sunday. And so they rejected him. They preferred victory not defeat.

We prefer victory. It's hard to be a UK fan or Louisville when you expect victory on the basketball court and they suffer defeat. Remember back to when you were dating (or maybe you still are), and you asked someone out on a date and they said no... defeated. Maybe some of you like to live vicariously through your children, whether it be through their homework projects or sports activities. When they lose, you have a sense of loss, too.

Isn't the same true in your spiritual life? There are times when we feel defeated spiritually. Whenever the Law of God is proclaimed from the pulpit and you say, "He's talking about me. I'm the guilty one." That's hard, to admit defeat. When your King tells you to raise your children, by not exasperating them, but by bringing them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. And you say to yourself, "I know I haven't done that very well." Your King asks you as a child or teenager or young adult to be respectful in the way you speak to all adults, not just my parents, and you say, "I fail pretty miserably at that." Your king tells you to build up your brothers and sisters in Christ in the way you speak to them and the way you speak about them, I have to admit I often don't do that. I see how generous my King is to me, yet I thank him by being generous to myself. My King tells me to trust him when I give of my offerings, yet I withhold from him, afraid that he won't provide for my needs. When we see how miserably we fail to obey our King, we feel defeated spiritually.

The ultimate spiritual defeat comes when you or a loved one face sickness and death, and you know that you can't do anything about it. You know that death and sickness come because of sin that lives in each of us. We realize that we are defeated spiritually. We can't do anything about it. We need someone to save us.

So, through faith, we look to our King. Today we look to our King as he arrives in Jerusalem, but with such humility! He rides into the city to be defeated, and he knows it! The purpose for his defeat is found in the word the children shouted, "Hosanna!" A Hebrew word that means "Save!" Jesus rode into Jerusalem to be defeated at the hands of his enemies. He allowed the religious leaders of the Jews to arrest him, falsely sentence him to die. He allowed the Romans to pin him to a tree. For what purpose? So that he could be defeated by yet more enemies; your sins and hell and death and the devil. He allowed himself to be defeated so that he might be the victor!

Christus Paradox – our theme for the past six Sundays. Yes, a strange contradiction of Christ, that he is both defeated and the victor, but true! Jesus was defeated by your sins of stinginess and mistrust, by your sinful attitudes of unkindness. By taking them on himself he also allowed the horrors of hell to overcome him and defeat him. The Creator of life allows death to defeat him. For what purpose? So that he might win the victory for you! By his death he put your sins to death. They're gone as far as God is concerned. By his

suffering he spared you from the horrors of hell. He succumbed to death so that you have victory your final enemy: death. You have won through Christ!

It feels good to win, doesn't it? It's no fun losing. But even in losing coaches try to sugarcoat it. A coach may tell his basketball team that they had a moral victory. They played well and honest and to the best of their ability. But do the players of UK or Louisville feel like winners today? No. They aren't displaying that trophy in their school. Ask your child after a loss on the field. They won't feel victorious, even after an ice cream treat at Dairy Queen. It feels good to win. But Christ's victory over your death and over your grave and over your sins is more than a warm, fuzzy feeling. It's a fact, a sure and certain promise. Christ's victory brings something real: peace. This peace is not the earthly peace Israel was looking for.

The peace the Maccabees brought lasted only 80 years. The Roman army came back and regained their rule of tyranny and oppression. It wasn't until 1948 that Israel established themselves as a state, but they're still looking for peace, as Jerusalem again became a victim of a suicide bombing just a couple of weeks ago. They still look for peace while Iran says, "We will not rest until Israel is annihilated." They won't find that peace. This is not the peace and victory Zechariah predicted. It is not the peace Jesus promised. But what he did promise is spiritual peace. Jesus brings that kind of peace.

You have the peace of knowing that through your baptism, God began your relationship with him, but giving you the gift of faith. You have the peace of knowing that through faith you receive Jesus' victory. You have the peace of knowing that when you approach the Lord's Table, broken and contrite, you will leave uplifted, forgiven, and reassured that your sins have indeed been covered by the blood of Christ. You have the peace of knowing that when you come to church for worship, you will hear your pastor speak the gospel of Christ crucified for me...every Sunday. You have the peace of knowing that even though all is not right with your life, all is right with your God, the relationship that matters the most. You have the peace of knowing that even in sickness and death, you have the ultimate victory - eternal peace in heaven, where all of us, with our children, will be waving palm branches once again, a sign of our victory over the grave and hell.

That's why we sing, "Hava nagila! Let us rejoice!" Your King is defeated yet lives victorious! We responded to our king's victory this morning with songs of praise, our children's voices, with choir and instruments. The joy of Christ's victory spills over into every aspect of our lives. We will respond to our King with our offerings, generous and free, fully trusting he will provide what we need. We will respond with our lives of love in the way we raise our children. We will love and respect our parents. We will love our brothers and sisters in Christ by the way we speak to them and about them. We will have joy in our hearts, the joy of knowing peace of sins forgiven. We will respond to our King's invitations...

Your Savior invited you to march with him through the gates of the city today, and you responded. He invites you to return here Thursday night, to recline with him in the Upper Room at the Last Supper, to receive Holy Communion and sins forgiven; to walk with him in the garden; to witness his betrayal and defeat. Your King invites you to return here Good Friday evening, when the sanctuary will be bare, and to walk with him to the cross, so that you may behold his defeat. Why? So that through his defeat you see his victory. Holy Week, no, all of Lent, makes Easter Sunday morning all the more special and meaningful when we see Jesus' defeat is

really his victory. Easter will not be just about the new dress or new tie or the breakfast, but about the promise that was made and kept, "I will be defeated, yet emerge victorious." Behold, your King comes! See him defeated yet victorious! Amen!