

Palm Sunday – Year B – April 1, 2012 – Faith Lutheran Church – Radcliff, KY

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

“Jesus comes as your King, but not as you expected”

So... what do you think so far? The NCAA basketball tournament... did your team play the way you expected or are you disappointed today? Do your brackets match the current finals match up?

For our guests this morning... what about church today, is this what you were expecting? Why did you come to church today? Why do people come to church at all? Is it the social atmosphere that people crave? Is it because folks just want to be better people and they think that church can offer them help in that area? Do people come to church to be entertained with music and lights and a dynamic preacher who shares “Chicken soup for the soul” stories?

The whole purpose of church centers around none of these things. When we gather for church our worship centers around Christ. Today, like every Sunday, the sermon will focus on Christ Jesus. Today we will see that he rides into Jerusalem as the King, but not as we expected. We will explore that idea a little more today by looking at this lesson from the prophet Zechariah.

Now Zechariah isn't a book of the Bible that most Christians would pick to start with if they were beginning a new habit of daily devotional Bible reading. So I think it would be good for us this morning to take a brief historical tour so that we understand his book.

The Jews who were living in Palestine had fallen away from the true worship of the LORD. Instead they foolishly put their trust in the false gods of neighboring nations – gods made of wood and stone. God punished them by sending an enemy army from Babylon. The Babylonian army destroyed the temple Solomon had built, knocked down the walls of Jerusalem, and forced the Jews to march to Babylon, and to live there in exile, hundreds of miles away from their home. Through his prophets the LORD did promise the Jews that they would return to Jerusalem. After 70 years in exile, a king by the name of Cyrus allowed Jews to return to their homes. A group about the size of Elizabethtown made the long trek back to Jerusalem.

Through his prophets the LORD encouraged the people to rebuild the temple. This was exciting for the Jews. They had hoped for a restoration of their nation and immediately began to work on the temple rebuilding project. But, like many building projects there were construction delays, and it wasn't happening as quickly as the people anticipated. So they got lazy and just quit.

When the LORD told the Jews about their restoration he was talking about the physical restoration of the nation, but more importantly a spiritual renewal. **“Turn your hearts to me and I will turn to you,”** he promised. But the Jews focused only on the physical aspect of this renewal. Like an Ohio State fan who dreams of former glory days in basketball.... the Jews had been dreaming of Israel's former glory, when they were a powerhouse under the rule of King David, they enjoyed success in war, riches and wealth. The Jews

observed the people who lived in neighboring nations who had superior military strength, armies and navies, independence and wealth – and grew increasingly envious of their neighbors.

The LORD had to send Zechariah to his people and say to them, “All of these things that you are coveting in your heart as you look at other nations... you want to know what I am going to do with their wealth and power? I will take it away. And I will destroy your enemies.

“Yes!” thought the Jews, “This is what we’ve been waiting for!” Zechariah tells his people, “**Rejoice greatly and shout!**” The LORD says, “Yell until you’re hoarse,” (like many of you did last night watching basketball) – “because I am giving you a king, a king who is far superior than what they have, a king whose glory surpasses that of David and Solomon.” Yes, we’ll finally have a king! “**Behold, Your king comes gentle and riding on a donkey.**” Huh? When the other nations crowned their kings they rode into the city on a war horse, a mighty steed, with great pomp and power! But our king... gentle, riding on a donkey? Not exactly a reason to jump for joy and shout until I lose my voice. That’s not what they expected.

But Zechariah was pointing the people ahead to the King whom the LORD promised would come as the Savior, the Messiah. 400 years later, Jesus did just that on the day we call Palm Sunday. Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey as the King. And the Jews praised him because many expected him to bring peace to Israel, with military power, to free them from the rule of the Roman government, to bring back the glory days of an independent Israelite nation.

But Jesus did not come with spear and sword, but with the power of his Almighty Word. The kingdom he established was not an earthly one, but spiritual. Jesus was not what the Jews expected so they killed him.

What is it that you expect in life? Has it turned out the way you anticipated so far? What is it that you expect God to do for you?

That your marriage works with little effort from you, that your children be obedient, with minimal discipline and direction from you, that he fill your home with the newest and best things? Do you fall into the mindset of the entitlement generation that believes it is owed certain rights and benefits without further justification?

When life does not go the way you expect, do you find yourself blaming God? A Soldier redeploys home and knows it will be hard, but didn’t expect the transition to be so difficult: problems at home, with the spouse, with the children, at work, and he says, “This is not what I thought it would be, Lord.” A nasty cough and cold seems to be just another “bug” but a trip to the doctor’s office turns into, “You have cancer,” and you say, “This is not what I expected, God.” You are King of kings, yet you allow disease and death to take away those who are near and dear to me. I’m not happy with you right now, God! You are Lord of lords and yet you allow war to take away my mind and my friends. I’m not exactly happy with you right now!

But God is our Creator. What does he expect from us? To be content, not matter what the circumstances... to trust his promises, even when life seems to contradict his promises. I know, it’s a hard thing to do! But it is what God demands. But what he so often sees... is not that. He tells us what we deserve, “**The wages of sin is death.**” Your employer gives you a paycheck for the hours you work, because you earned those wages. For our sins against our God, our anger against him, our lack of trust, we deserve death. And not just the kind of

death where my body is buried six feet under the earth, but worse, eternal death, eternal separation from our God in hell.

How can he do that? How can a loving God send anyone to hell? Because he is a holy God and demands perfection from his creatures if they are to live with him in eternity.

God is not what we expected. But God does something totally unexpected. He says to you and me today, "You were expecting peace, wealth, power and riches and – you were thinking too small! Expect much more from me!" I am your King and this is what I am going to do for you.

Behold! Your king comes, gentle and riding on a donkey. It is not what we expect from a king – to be so humble. Most kings think about themselves and their power. But your King, Christ Jesus, comes to serve you. Vs9 **"Behold! Your King comes to you, righteous."** Yes, what God expects from us, Jesus did. While he lived on earth, he was always completely content with what his Father provided for him. He always trusted his Father and his promises – he knew that all things would work out for his benefit – even through his death. He never blamed his Father nor became angry with him, never once complaining that life didn't turn out the way he thought it should. This is what your King has done for you. More precious than a winning \$655million lottery ticket... God credits Jesus' righteous life to your spiritual bank account. When God looks at you and me, he sees that what was expected of us - accomplished in his Son Jesus.

"Behold! Your King comes to you having salvation!" This is why we celebrate Palm Sunday. Jesus rode into Jerusalem as a humble servant-King, to suffer and die. What king would do that? If Julius Caesar had known he was going to be murdered on that fateful Ides of March, he would never have stepped foot in the Senate again. Jesus rides into the city knowing all that is about to happen to him, and he does it willingly, to secure your salvation. Jesus rode into Jerusalem to bear the cross, to suffer your hell, to receive your punishment from God, and die in your place. And by dying, bringing salvation for you – salvation meaning that you have been rescued from all your sins – God the Father has done away with them forever; you have been rescued from hell – Satan can no longer threaten you with it; you have been rescued from death - you will live again.

This is why we will return here on Friday evening, to remember all the gory details of Jesus' death and all that it accomplished for you and me. This is why we will gather here again next Sunday, not to hunt for eggs and chocolate bunnies, but to celebrate Christ's victory over your grave by his resurrection. That's worth more than a million Cadbury eggs, isn't it?

Jump up and shout for joy! Look! Your King comes to you and he says, "This is what I will do for you." **I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River (that is the Euphrates) to the ends of the earth.**" (vs10)

What the Israelites were looking for was political peace, military might, victory on the battlefield. Jesus says, "You're thinking too small! Look at what I am going to do for you!" **I will proclaim peace to the nations.** I will command peace and it will happen! No president of the United States has ever done that before. As much as

our leaders have negotiated and threatened and pleaded and gone to war to make peace, it doesn't happen. And if it does, it lasts only a short while.

Jesus brings true lasting peace. Not peace on earth, but spiritual peace. A peace that isn't just for Americans – his rule of peace will extend to all people, every race, language, skin color and culture. This lasting peace is knowing that my guilt has been put on Christ – I am right with God. Peace of knowing that God forgives me every day – that he loves me in spite of who I am. Peace of knowing that he may not remove every trouble, but promises to give strength to get through the troubling times in life.

He brings everlasting peace – peace of knowing that when my loved ones die – they will be with their Savior forever. Peace of knowing that when I close my eyes in death, they will open and see my Savior face-to-face.

We don't always get what we expect or want in life – half of you are disappointed today because your team lost last night, others because their lottery ticket didn't win, others because life stinks right now... but that's ok. You have so much more with Jesus. Look, here comes your King, gentle and bringing righteousness for you and salvation for you and peace for you.

To the King be glory forever and ever! Amen!