**Philippians 2:5-11** April 14, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Palm Sunday

*Philippians 2:5Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

*6Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

*9Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Reasons to Celebrate!**

Somewhere in our visits to different colleges for our different children there was a college with a wall-sized monthly calendar. They felt it important for the younger generation to remember days of national importance. So, in the student union, next to the bookstore, they had a wall-sized calendar reminding the students of national holidays. Because, you see, the younger generation finds it easy to forget that today, April 14th, is National Reach as High as You Can Day (yes, April 14th), or that next Wednesday is National Hug a Plumber Day. It was good to see a college that didn’t take itself too seriously and let its students have a sense of humor!

Of course, you are smart enough to know the difference between a publicity stunt and a genuine national holiday. In spite of the multiplication of national days of observance, you aren’t confused. You realize that some days are actually important enough to celebrate. And for you, those days are also important enough that you don’t need a wall-sized calendar to remind you. Memorial Day reminds us of those who sacrificed their lives for their country and countrymen. Let us respect their sacrifice! The Fourth of July reminds us of the unique history of our nation, and the great freedoms we have. What a blessing! And there are a handful of other really important days.

The Christian Church has the same thing. Year after year we have some important days that we celebrate: Christmas and Easter first come to mind. Why do this? Why do we celebrate the same days year after year? Don’t we say pretty much the same things, celebrate the same things, every year? Well, yes. We do. There are some basic things, some foundational truths that, without them, you don’t have Christianity. We need to regularly review them, otherwise we drift away from the core values of our faith.

So we celebrate the two big days: Christmas and Easter. And then we have maybe 6 or 7 second tier days, like Epiphany, Reformation, Good Friday, Thanksgiving and Transfiguration.

Among these is Palm Sunday. What is the big deal about this annual church holiday, Palm Sunday? Is it about the palms? The donkey? That crazy word, “Hosanna”? What is special? Well, just look at him. Just look at Jesus! And you say, “Well, he doesn’t look too impressive up there in his only change of clothes on a plodding donkey. The Romans who just rode into town on their galloping horses clad in shining bronze armor, iron swords and painted shields—now that was impressive. But Jesus? Not so much.”

That is just the point. There is a song in our hymnal with magnificent words that I love, but the tune… If we tried to sing it, more than one of you on your way out of church would say, “Pastor, I don’t know about that second hymn…” But here is how the words go, “Weary of all trumpeting, Weary of all killing, Weary of all songs that sing Promise, not fulfilling.”

Yes, we are weary of all the songs that the powerful of this world sing to us. They never tire of trumpeting all their solutions to the world’s woes, but in the end they are always “promises non-fulfilling.” The daily news is full of the war of words, insults and vicious tirades. Let the politicians, the talking heads sing their songs of victory, “If only we could…” We weary of it. Oh sure, we know that to throw up our hands and walk away is even worse, but their promises are non-fulfilling. Human sin has broken this world and it can never again be glued back together on this side of eternity. We get that one piece of legislation through and the social ills persist, or another one raises its head. One evil empire falls, only for another to take its place. Watch these people championing our causes and you find out that so many of them are actually on the take, or more concerned about the next election than life inside the four walls of your house. “Weary of all trumpeting… Weary of all songs that sing promise, non-fulfilling.” Aren’t you weary of their words, their ways, their songs?

But look at this one riding into Jerusalem. He is different. He invites them to his side, but the battle he will fight will be fought by an army of one. He lets the crowds praise him, but he doesn’t depend on them for his mandate. He doesn’t require a popular vote or an electoral college or a majority on the Supreme Court. He goes for the people, seeking a good that they have not even asked for.

How can this be? How can his song be so different from the songs that all the other politicians, rebels, celebrities, and talking heads of this world sing? That is explained in our reading today.

Now, before we look at the details of what Philippians chapter 2 tells us, we should notice that Philippians chapter 2 doesn’t talk about Palm Sunday. It doesn’t even mention Palm Sunday. But it tells us why we see what we see on Palm Sunday. It tells us that if anything, on Palm Sunday the cheers and songs of the crowd in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, if anything, are too soft, too dim. Jesus deserves even more! He deserves even more, because ***“Christ Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing.”***

He is so different. Looking at the world, how many *powerful* advocates of the poor and downtrodden live in mansions? Most of them. How many who rail against the unfairness of the system “are worth” seven figures (millions) or eight figures (tens of millions)? Most of them. They say one thing, but they live quite another.

But Jesus was different. Here we are clearly told that Jesus, before he was born, he existed from before the world began. He existed not as “Jesus”, but as the second person of the Trinity; true God with the Father and Holy Spirit. He took all the honor and glory of being God, and he put it on the end table and he walked out the door. Then he popped into our world as a 8 pound something ounce defenseless baby laid first in a feed trough (that’s what a manger is) in Bethlehem. He got nothing and lost everything in the bargain. That’s what it means when it says that ***“[he] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.”*** His deity, his being God was not something to clutched onto at all costs. He had so much more than the wealthy and powerful of this world, and he gave up, not some of it, but all of it. He walked the walk to an extent that we can’t even comprehend.

You know how it feels when you do the right thing for the right reasons? (You know that it is only by God’s working and even then it is still imperfect.) But I hope that in a God-pleasing way, you feel the satisfaction of living for Christ sometimes when you do stop and help someone with a flat tire; or regularly give a generous percentage of you income to God’s work; or being there to help people in their day of need. It is good to help others.

Christ Jesus didn’t do this sometimes, he did it all the time. He didn’t give 10%, he gave 100%. He never took a rest on the couch, vegged out in front of the tv, etc.! You won’t see Jesus in a movie theater his hand buried in a king size tub of popcorn. Instead you see him so tired from preaching and healing that he falls asleep in a boat in a storm and can barely be woken. You see him relying on the charity of others, essentially a beggar, for the duration of his ministry. You see him waking up at three AM, not for alone time, but prayer time. You see him cry for Jerusalem, a city full of people which would shout for his execution by crucifixion. Our salvation was his goal every moment of his life.

Yet while he ***“took the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness”*** he did not stop being true God. At times he did access the power which was his. He did heal the sick. He did cast out demons and even raise the dead. Never for himself. Always for others. Always that people might know who he was, not through a show of brute force, but through the exercise of power in the name of mercy.

The whole while, Jesus knew the final goal, the goal which looms large in this week before Easter: the cross. He didn’t let the popularity go to his head and he didn’t let the painful prospect of the cross slow his pace. ***“Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”***

He not only lived a life of service, he died the most shameful and fearful of all deaths. It is the stuff that horror films are made of. A death of pain, slow pain, where the victim feels life slipping away, not by the second, but by the hour. Beyond the pain, it is also death where one is stripped of all human dignity, gazed at by malicious on-lookers who only mocked a victim’s powerlessness writhing and groaning while nailed to some pieces of lumber.

All this he did for us. He took our sins upon himself, he suffered not only one of the worst deaths devised by humanity, but he suffered something more, that we only realize when Jesus cried out, *“My God, why have you forsaken me.”* He felt the punishment that we deserve in hell.

Jesus knew that every step of his life. As he neared his final tormented hours, he could feel the heat, eventually even praying that it might pass from him. He felt that even on Palm Sunday while he humbly yet majestically rode that donkey into Jerusalem. He resolutely made his way. Surely it was on his mind even as the crowds cheered him.

Imagine yourself in that crowd. Imagine someone shimmying up a palm tree with a knife, tossing a frond down to you to put on the road before his donkey. Imagine Jesus passing so close to you that you catch a faint whiff of the donkey smell. Imagine the energy of thousands, if not tens of thousands shouting as our choir sang, “Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!” Yet you know something they did not yet know. They praise him for his miracles. Some perhaps have a vague idea that he is their Savior. But you know how he is going to achieve it, through a cross. You know that his humility is only the beginning of a complete humiliation, a complete humiliation that ends in a terrible death. And you know it is for you, for the people you are literally rubbing shoulders with. Of all the shouts in that crowd, should yours not be the loudest?

Yes, it should be. Because you know better than all the rest of them why it is that ***“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”***

So what is this annual celebration of Palm Sunday about? It is a realization that we owe our lives, our eternities, to one who humbly laid all his rights, all his honor, all his power, everything to the side for us. Praise him who has humbled himself. And as we re-live Holy Week, praise him for what he is about to do!