

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Palm Sunday
Saturday, April 12, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, April 13, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.

“Easter is Just on the Horizon”

Luke 23:1-56

Our Gospel reading for today was very long, and it is rich with many different episodes that happened during Christ's period of tremendous suffering that we celebrate as Holy Week. Now, since tomorrow/today is Palm Sunday, you might be asking some questions about the choice of this appointed Gospel reading.

Why isn't the Gospel the account of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem? Why is all of Luke Chapter 23 included in the lesson? Why are we hearing the Passion reading? That is for Good Friday, isn't it? This Sunday is historically called Palm Sunday – for good reason. It is also called the Sunday of the Passion.

We begin Passion Week. Passion, in its proper understanding, usually involves suffering. Passion is a love or desire that consumes you and compels you to act, even if it will bring suffering. Jesus went through His Passion because He has passion for you. He is consumed with the desire to save you. The object of His love is you. This desire compels Him to endure the humiliation of being mocked, beaten, spit upon, and nailed to a cross.

Such was His passion for you. And for all of you who stand before God and His church and confess your faith, you too are to be filled with passion. Last week in Bible class, we talked about how we as Confessional Lutherans are not really

“Protestants.” We are not “protesters” of the Roman Church. We confess the truth of the Gospel – Justification by grace through faith alone. We confess our faith. Faith creates passion. Belief in God that does not inspire passion is merely “head knowledge.”

This Gospel reading may not be the story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey and having “Hosanna in the highest” sung to Him, however, it gives us insight and helps us to understand what happened from Palm Sunday until Easter morning. Christ willingly enters the city even though He knows His journey will end in death on Mt. Calvary, but He presses forward knowing that Easter is also just on the horizon.

When Jesus entered into Jerusalem as King amid the waving palm branches, the people were praising God in loud voices saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.” Israel has but one king: God. If only those people had realized what they were really saying.

Luke’s Gospel stresses the point that Jesus is the King of the Jews. The words “king” and “kingdom” appear six times in today’s reading. We begin with the chief priests and teachers of the law accusing Jesus before Pontius Pilate – spewing forth several dubious claims about Christ subverting the nation and opposing taxes to Caesar, which was a bold-faced lie.

But then they accused him of something that was true: “He claims to be Christ, a king.” They got Pontius Pilate to ask the question, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “You have said so.”

But Christ came to earth to be more than just a king. He was also both Prophet and Priest. He came as a prophet performing miracles and, as Scripture

says, to “preach good news to the poor.” He came as a priest to offer a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins on behalf of all people.

And Christ’s role as both prophet and king are given value through His priestly sacrifice. Christ’s kingship is defined in that sign placed over the cross. THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. And without that event, there would have been no “Good News” to preach and His miracles would have been nothing but an interesting side show.

It is in His crucifixion, much more so than in His triumphant ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, that Jesus is recognized as King, as Savior, and as the Son of God. Christ is the King who gives His life for His people, and in so doing, gives life to His people.

The irony of our Gospel reading is that the priests and teachers of the law, who studied Scripture with great zeal, did not understand what kind of King entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. However, the thief, the common, uneducated, criminal understood who that King was hanging next to him, dying.

Rather than mocking God, the Word of God penetrates his heart and confronts him with the reality that his only hope lies in that man Jesus who is hanging next to him. We say that we do not know much about that thief on the cross. But one thing that we do know is, that very day, he was in Paradise. His journey on earth was about to end in death, but like it was for Christ, Easter was just on the horizon.

It is not the level of education we have achieved which allows us to confidently proclaim our faith. Our faith is not an intellectual exercise. It is the Holy Spirit who has created faith in us at our Baptism. We find it amazing that a crucified thief could gain such insight when the scribes and teachers of the law

were blind to who Christ was.

But then, is it really any more amazing than what we have experienced. It is not our great intellect, education, or life of righteousness which gave us insight. Faith was created and freedom from the guilt of our sin was brought to us through no work of our own. And, like the thief, we rejoice as the gates of heaven have been opened to us.

Certainly, it is a day to rejoice. And with those people on Palm Sunday, we confess our faith and sing Hosanna: Hw-shana (in Hebrew) "Save us now, we pray." We continually ask this of our Lord, and Savior, and King. Save us now, we pray.

We have been saved. Thanks be to God that He sent our King not to just ride into a city, but to hang on a cross. It is the people at Christ's cross that should have been singing "Hosanna": save us Lord. But only the thief hanging next to Him offered such a plea and confession of faith.

We celebrate Palm Sunday with "Hosanna's" to our King, even though, like with Christ and the thief, our journey will end in death, but we press forward in the face of trials, difficulties, tragedies, even death, knowing we are the object of the intense love of Christ our Lord, and that thanks to Him, Easter is just on the horizon. Amen.