

Palm Sunday

Monday John 12: 12,13

Palms Over Passion

Palm Sunday is the beginning of Holy Week, the last week of our Lord's journey to the cross. This is the week of Christ's life that we know the most about. We know where He was every day of the week with the possible exception of Wednesday.

You probably saw palms when you went to church yesterday. But depending on which Bible reading your pastor read, you might not have heard palms mentioned. Originally, this Sunday in the Church Year focused on the Passion of our Lord. It was called Sunday of the Passion and had a very long Bible reading about the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. The reading about Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was used as an entrance rite. The Lutherans in the 16th century broke with this tradition and made the Palm Sunday reading the main reading.

But guess what? You still might not have heard palms mentioned in the reading. Only the Gospel of John mentions that the crowd scattered palm branches before Jesus. They probably chose palms as a political expression. The palm branch was considered a flag of Israel. The Jews years before had welcomed one of their conquering heroes by waving palm branches. So the crowds were probably expressing their acceptance of Jesus as a reigning political ruler. Maybe then it would be better to go back to the Passion over the Palms as is the trend in many Lutheran churches today.

Not so fast. Do you know where palm branches show up next? In another writing of St. John's, the Book of Revelation. John is shown those in heaven standing with palm branches in their hands. For this reason, the palm has been considered an emblem, a sign of the victory the sinner has in Christ over sin, death, and the power of the devil. Some churches, Lutherans included, use to put palm branches in the hands of the dead as they lay in the coffin to express the fact that now their dead in Christ stand in heaven with palm branch in hand among all the other saints.

So palm branches can remind us of two things this week. They can be a symbol of our Lord's Passion and of our victory over sin, death, and the devil. They can remind us of how much our Lord suffered and of how much we gain. We can see them in the hands of sinners like us who tend to misunderstand what Jesus is really all about as the Palm Sunday crowd did, and we can see them in the hands of sinners in heaven forgiven by the Jesus who does not depend on us or our understanding to save us.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God the Father, who sent Your Son to take our nature upon Him and to suffer death on the cross that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of our Savior Jesus Christ in His patience and also have our portion in His resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday Romans 5:7-8

Much More Than an Example

Our prayer for this Holy Week refers two times to Christ being our example. Christ is certainly an example for us of both humility and patience as the Collect mentions, but He is much more than that. If the only thing or even the main thing we get from Holy Week is an example for us to follow, how sad it would be for us. Oh, we can certainly learn to be humble when we see how Jesus smeared with blood and spit humbly watches as the Sanhedrin loses control and Pilate unravels. We can certainly learn to be patient when we suffer innocently as we follow the truly innocent Christ through so many miscarriages of justice. However, there comes a point beyond which we cannot go.

Paul takes us to that point in Romans where he says, "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." We may think we can follow Christ's example to the extent that we love our enemies, but die for them? Who among us could forgive, let alone die for, someone who hurt a loved one of ours and still laughed at it?

Jesus being our example is just not enough to get out of Holy Week. "Jesus did it; how about you?" is no comfort for sinners who know how weak and sinful they really are. Thanks be to God that He did not put His Son on the cross bearing our sins as just an example. No, God was demonstrating, says St. Paul, HIS OWN love for us. Holy Week is an example, an example of God's love not one for us to follow. It is an example for us to find great joy, comfort and forgiveness in.

All our Christianity, all our believing, all our doing things for Jesus break down during Holy Week just as it did for the disciples. We can only follow Jesus so far; then hell and all its fury scare us off. But Jesus goes all the way. We can follow to the Judgment hall, and we can view the Lord of Life arraigned. We can marvel at the wormwood and the gall and the pangs His soul sustained. But He did not endure the trials, the wormwood, the gall, and the pangs, so we could take them for some sort of instruction manual, pattern, or example. He suffered the trials, drained the wormwood and the gall, endured the pangs to save us for all eternity. We use Holy Week rightly when we find comfort in the fact that if that happened to Jesus for my sins, it cannot happen to me for them.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God the Father, who sent Your Son to take our nature upon Him and to suffer death on the cross that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of our Savior Jesus Christ in His patience and also have our portion in His resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday John 6:48-51

A Portion In His Resurrection

We are praying this week for our portion in His resurrection.≡ This week is serious business. It is all about our salvation, our resurrection, our everlasting life. But do not think these things are something way off in the future.

In the early church Holy Communion was referred to by some as the Medicine of Immortality.≡ The Lord's Supper, the Body and Blood of Christ, was seen as the way Christ renewed these bodies for life everlasting. By placing His immortal, Holy body into our mortal, sinful ones, He is beginning the process of resurrection already now. So right now our portion in His resurrection is found in the Holy Communion.

Ah, but what about those we do not commune now? What about our own kids? Have they no share in the Lord's resurrection? Martin Luther says in the part of the Catechism that deals with the Sacrament of the Altar, where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation.≡ There is forgiveness in the Absolution. Sins are really forgiven by the words of the pastor. There is forgiveness through the Word attached to the physical waters of Baptism. Here is a portion of the Lord's resurrection open to all who have ears, to all who have bodies, to all sinners. Our connection to His resurrection is the Means of Grace He left to us. They are physical touching points for these bodies of flesh to find comfort in.

But they are still only a portion. The fullness awaits the Last Day. For now ears that hear the Holy Absolution still may go deaf. Bodies that have been cleansed of their sins by Baptism may still get cancer. Mouths that have ate and drank Christ's Body and Blood will still shrivel and wrinkle. However, rest assured these Medicines of Immortality are still very much at work.

Have not you ever been to a doctor and he gave you medicine saying, 'You have to take this for a week or ten days before it starts to work.'≡ And you do it, do not you? He is the doctor. His word is good. So you in faith take that medicine without seeing any visible effects. Well, your Jesus says that you will not see the fullness, or feel the fullness of your Baptism, your Absolution, or your Communion until the Last Day. Then these will have an awesome, powerful effect. You will be changed in the twinkling of an eye into what God from all eternity meant for you to be. But that is then. For now, you take your Medicine in faith. However, your faith is not in some sinful man, but in the God-Man, in the One who is the Resurrection and the Life.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God the Father, who sent Your Son to take our nature upon Him and to suffer death on the cross that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of our Savior Jesus Christ in His patience and also have our portion in His resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Keeping Vigil

Today is a day for anyone who as ever waited for the results of a medical test, for their loved one in surgery, for their loved one away at war. I have got a secret for all such waiters. They really weren't waiting for what they thought they were. You know that already if you have been through a long series of medical tests only to go through more. You know that whether you have had many loved ones going through surgery or many surgeries for your loved one only to face yet one more. You know that if your long awaited loved one came back from war only to leave for some other dangerous destination. What we are really all waiting for is the Lord.

The writer of Psalm 130 says it so beautifully: *Al wait for the Lord, my soul waits....My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchmen wait for the morning, more than the watchmen wait for the morning.*≡ Whether we know it or not we wait for the Lord. He is the only One that can provide the perfect healing we really crave when waiting for a medical test. He alone can give us everlasting life with our loved ones which is what we really desire as we wait anxiously in the surgery waiting room. Only our Lord can put an end to war and all else that separates sinners, and that is what we really long to see ended while we wait anxiously for our loved one who is separated from us by war or some other tragedy.

Today=s a day for all who have waited. Today we keep watch not with the first disciples because every single one of them believed, knew, were certain, that Jesus was stone-cold dead for good. Today we keep watch with all those other Christians who have watched from the second Easter on. The same longing, craving, desiring that burns in our hearts burned in their's too. They knew as we do that nothing less than the Lord can meet the longing, fill the craving, or quench the desiring that burns in our hurts. Nothing less than a resurrected Lord who has once and for all, once and for good stomped the devil, defeated death, and paid for sins can answer our empty, aching hearts.

So we watch today. Even though we are over nineteen hundred and sixty years away from the glorious fact of the resurrection, still we watch as if it never happened. Why? Because it is such a glorious miracle that sinners *Anaturally*≡ conclude that it could not have happened. So we watch with catches in our breath and gasps in our voices just to see if the pastor is going to shout to us yet again this year, *AChrist has risen!*≡ We watch just so *AHe is risen indeed!*≡ can come bursting forth from our breasts and out of our mouths as naturally as a note comes from a plucked string. *AChrist has risen*≡ is the only note, the only chord, the only string that our hearts long to have struck, plucked, or played.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God the Father, who sent Your Son to take our nature upon Him and to suffer death on the cross that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of our Savior Jesus Christ in His patience and also have our portion in His resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.