

Palm Sunday
The Rev. Dcn. C. Lance Davis

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of
Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.

The morning of September 21st, 46 BC was, by all accounts, spectacular. The warm air of late summer lends an atmosphere of expectation, and the gilded monuments of the forum glitter magnificently in the bright sunlight of a clear, blue sky. Legions of soldiers are set in array, their armour freshly polished, swords and spears in hand. Majestic crimson standards, lifted high in the air upon great wooden crosses, are carried in slow procession, as the people of the city, drawn out into the streets by tidings of good news, eagerly await a glimpse of their new ruler. The conqueror’s spoils go before, seized slaves and stolen silver, a ritual humiliation of the vanquished. A large and mighty bull, prepared for sacrifice, is solemnly goaded forward to its inevitable destiny with death. And then, amid shouts of acclamation, the expected one appears. Upon a golden chariot, drawn by four white stallions, robed in kingly violet, and surmounted by waving branches of palm and

laurel, stands Gaius Julius Caesar, the Liberator of Rome. The king is come, in triumphal procession, having slaughtered his enemies, capturing the city, and now demanding the obeisance of his new subjects. This was an all-too-familiar scene to the peoples of the ancient world—a victorious conquerer rejoicing in a dominion and power won through forced subjugation, violence, and death.

This morning, we are faced with a triumphal procession of a different kind. A young man, barely thirty years old, is preparing to enter into Jerusalem so that he might finally reveal his true identity to the world. You see, for three years the people of Judaea have wondered after this enigmatic man. Who is he? A prophet? A sorcerer? A lunatic who demands people drink his blood? Demon-possessed, or divinely-empowered? But just a few days ago, something happened that has set Jerusalem abuzz, gaining the affection of the people and the ire of the authorities.

A man named Lazarus—well-known and beloved in the region—was struck with sudden illness and smitten with an untimely death. After four days in the tomb, his surviving relatives are paid a visit by that itinerant preacher whose teachings and miracles have bewildered the people. He—who showed himself in the wilderness to be the new Moses, the hope of all the prophets; who in the miracle of the loaves revealed himself to be the new Manna, offering his own sacrificed flesh for the healing of men’s souls—now, in the sight of all, calls forth Lazarus from the grave.

By this act, it becomes undeniably clear to the Jews that Christ must be their Messiah: the long-awaited Son of David, the King of Israel. His fame spreads throughout the land, and thus as he finally arrives at Jerusalem, the excitement has reached a fever pitch. Palms are procured, the townsfolk flood the streets, and the deliverance of Jerusalem from Roman oppression finally, after so many years, seems nigh. But as Our Lord enters the city, it is quickly apparent that he is not exactly the King they have hoped for.

He who flies upon the wings of the cherubim, and is borne aloft on the fires of the seraphim, rides meekly upon the back of a donkey, an animal associated with peace, humility, and suffering. He is flanked not by soldiers, but fishermen. This King is going forth not to slaughter his enemies, but to be slaughtered for them; that through his death, he might rescue humanity from the dominion of the devil. He will take captivity itself captive; his spoils will be the powers and principalities who have imprisoned mankind in sin and fear, as he plunders Hell and liberates Adam. His standard will be a wooden Cross crimsoned by his own blood, lifted high above the world, whereby he will drag all men to himself.

The Jews, however, desire a king who will force obeisance through law and violence, not a King who patiently persuades through truth and love. They desire a king who will vanquish his

enemies, crush all opposition, bind the nobles of the Gentiles with links of iron, and prove to the world that Israel is supreme; not a King who invites Romans, Samaritans, and Greeks to share a Kingdom “of truth and life, of justice, love, and peace”¹.

The Jews want Caesar for their messiah, not Christ. And because they cannot bring themselves to acknowledge his true identity, they must kill their King. Waving palms will soon be replaced by piercing spears. Shouts of “hosanna” changed into cries of crucifixion. Where before they had stripped their own clothes to lay a path for him, soon they will strip his garments to humiliate this imposter upon a Cross. And all because he is not the King they want.

The kingdom his death and resurrection will inaugurate is not of this world, and the demands he will place upon his subjects cannot be reconciled with the politics of secular and godless government. His is a kingdom of non-violence, where the palm of victory is awarded not to warlords, but to martyrs. A kingdom where he will not even permit his disciples to take up arms in self-defence: “Put up thy sword into its place, O Peter: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” His is a kingdom whose gates are never shut: to which all the peoples and nations of the world are beckoned so that they might partake of the tree of life and be healed from the diseases of pride, avarice, and ambition.

¹ Preface for Christ the King.

His is a kingdom of humility, whose Monarch is born in a stable and dies a criminal. This King's subjects are commanded to turn the other cheek, bless their enemies, and do good to those who hate them. His is a kingdom of co-suffering Love: sacrificial and unconditional, of which there can be no greater expression than to lay down one's life for another. The politics of Christ's Kingdom bear little resemblance to those of any earthly kingdom. And this is why his own people will kill him.

I wonder how many of us would do the same. How often do we allow our politics to trump our profession of faith? How many of us conform our Creed to our Constitution? Are we tempted to think that if only we could seize state power, impose Biblical law, and punish God's enemies, we would force the world to accept God's kingdom? Our sincerity may be impeccable, but our King will not indulge us in such illusions. Christ's Kingdom is found not in the halls of power, but in the hearts of regenerate men. He orders men's lives not by courts, but by the Comforter. Our lasting standard is not a star-spangled banner, but a blood-stained Cross.

Our true citizenship is in heaven, from which we await our crucified King, who calls us to conversion, to offer ourselves upon his holy Altar, to take up our Cross and trod the way of affliction and death with him. The paradox of suffering and evil in this world cannot be resolved by political might or earthly power, but only by the royal God-Man hanging upon the tree.

Let us resolve, then, to lay aside the idols of our ideologies, politics, and identities, and bend the knee to our servant-King whose throne is Golgotha and whose palace is our hearts; that by following the example of his great humility and patience, we may be exalted with him in his Kingdom of love, life, and peace.

“Ride on, ride on in majesty:
in lowly pomp, ride on to die.
O Christ, thy triumphs now begin
o’er captive death and conquered sin.”

Amen.