

SERMON FOR PALM SUNDAY
APRIL 14, 2019
TEXT: LUKE 15:7
THEME: A JOYFUL PARADE

“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

In the name of Jesus:

Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week! The day when children and adults wave palm branches and proclaim: Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna to the Lord! Today in our reading we watch Jesus ride headlong into the city of Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, to the refrain of hosanna from the people. The crowds gathered and lined the streets of Jerusalem to see this King. To do what Jesus did, to ride on a donkey that Sunday, the meaning and implications were not lost on the people. When King David wanted to show the nation that his son, Solomon, was to be his successor, David told his people to parade Solomon into the city of Jerusalem so that everyone could see, and sing of the king. So the crowds lined the streets, singing hosanna to king Jesus.

One would wonder what Jesus was thinking as He rode into Jerusalem. He was no stranger to crowds, crowds of people came to hear Jesus preach, to be fed by him in the miracles of the feeding of the 4000 and 5000. Jesus was indeed no stranger to crowds, in fact He once described the weary and scattered crowds of people as wandering sheep who were without a shepherd. Jesus felt for the crowds, He had compassion on them.

Not long before riding into Jerusalem, Jesus had visited the home of the sinful tax collector named Zacchaeus. The wee little tax collector frequently robbed the

people in his collection of the taxes, adding addition monies to their tax bills that he would skim off the top for himself. When Jesus visited his home, the tax man was moved to repentance, turning from his sin and trusting in Christ as his Savior. Jesus thus said of him;” Today salvation has come to this house, for the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:9-10).

The hosannas we sing and hear this Palm Sunday are prayers spoken by real life sinners, who pray in these hosannas: “Save us we pray!” The word began as a prayer, as a cry for help. Later, hosanna became a word of celebration, where God’s people, moved by appreciation for what God has done would cry Hosanna, meaning Help or salvation has arrived! God has come to save His people. So it is not of a surprise to hear the crowds sing hosanna to Jesus on Palm Sunday, for He has come on the back of a donkey to save sinners. Jesus is all about saving the lost; that is why He came. And that is why within a week, Jesus would die on a cross.

Palm Sunday reminds us that where the lost are sought and found there will be celebration. That is the central meaning of the chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke. The lost are saved and therefore there is rejoicing. The woman who loses the coin sweeps the house until she finds it, and when she does, she rejoices! The prodigal son comes home, the lost had been found, and so that father throws a party! And when the lost sheep are brought back into the fold, heaven rejoices! God rejoices when sinners repent, for the lost have been found.

The Pharisees and Saducees were not in the mood to rejoice. They weren’t happy when sinners repented. They were more interested in judging people for what they had done wrong, and then they would thank God that they were as sinful

as those whom they condemned. So Jesus tells the story of a shepherd who leaves 99 sheep behind to chase after the one lost sheep, and when He finds it, he lifts it to His shoulders to take it home, so that the shepherd and the whole family, indeed, the whole village, would be able to rejoice with Him.

I remember reading a story of a church in Minnesota that held a live, living nativity scene, replete with costumed characters and live animals, including four sheep. Unfortunately, the fence around the stable that first year wasn't built high enough. Sure enough, the lead sheep was over the fence and the three others quickly followed. The pageant was underway but now was interrupted as the pastor and several others took off after the sheep. The pastor went after the lead sheep and shouted over his shoulder for someone to help chase after which sheep.

A mile and a half up the road that pastor caught up with the lead sheep and tackled it into a large snow drift. Remembering the pictures he saw as a youth that depicted Jesus carrying the lost sheep on his shoulders, the pastor attempted to lift this sheep on his shoulders, but the sheep was so heavy that the pastor wrenched his back and lay in the snow drift, clinging to that sheep for two hours until help came. Two others helped the pastor get the sheep home. What the pastor remembers most, though, is how that little crowd of people from the church and neighborhood joined in cheers and muffled glove applause as each sheep was returned to the fold. It was a picture of the Church at its best, he said, working together, albeit clumsily and not without pain, to bring home the lost, and then rejoicing over each sinner who repents.

We, in the Church, are at risk of losing what it means to be the hosanna center. We forget what it means to rejoice over sinners who repent. We begin to believe that we have no need of repentance, and we forget that we are sinful, to the core. We forget the sheer joy of being saved ourselves. We can become known for judging other sinners rather than welcoming them. In our self-righteousness, we can expect that only good people, people like us, belong in our churches. So we get caught up in our own hypocrisy. We become the church that serves our self instead of the Church that exists to seek and save lost sinners, who wander about life without the True Shepherd.

If we as the Church are to claim Christ's mission of seeking and saving the lost in our generation, it will begin when we see each of us, our own self, as the one lost sheep that Jesus lifts on His shoulders. And we will see Jesus, the One who saves us, getting down from the donkey and heading to the cross of Calvary, to suffer and die in our place, laying down His life so that we might not ever die. Then, seeing Jesus die and rise again, we will be moved to say and sing: "Hosanna, save us, we pray, salvation has arrived in Jesus!"

Dear friend, Jesus came to seek and save the lost. That is why you are here, for once you were lost but now you are found. When one sinner repents, there is celebration on earth and by the angelic host of heaven. So whose rescue will be celebrated next? Last week we all experienced a high point in the life of Redeemer Lutheran Church. Eight children were brought to the waters of Holy Baptism. Eight children who were not God's children became God's children. Wasn't that wonderful? I kept hearing from members what a great day that day was. And it

was! Eight children rescued from the devil's clutches and placed into the arms of the Savior. It was so joyful, let's do it again! Together as a congregation let's seek to bring more lost sheep into the fold. Let's allow God use us to bring more people to Jesus. Perhaps it will come at the baptism of a child, or in the first person singular witness of one who tells the story of their own personal rescue by God. Each lost sheep, now safe in the arms of the Shepherd, is worth celebrating, especially when you consider the price Jesus paid to make the lost sheep His own. Let's learn to celebrate our Savior, and rejoice in our salvation, so that we might share the Good News of Jesus for the salvation of all.

In Jesus' name!

Amen