

**Sermon for Palm Sunday / Sunday of The Passion
Luther Memorial Chapel, Shorewood, Wisconsin**

Pastor Michael Larson

4/5/2020



Readings: Matthew 21:1–9 (Palm Sunday Procession); Zechariah 9:9–12; Philippians 2:5–11; Matthew 26:1–27:66

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide, For round us falls the eventide. O let Your Word, that saving light, Shine forth undimmed into the night. In these last days of great distress Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness. That we keep pure till life is spent Your holy Word and Sacrament.

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear friends of God, let me level with you! Here we are at the gate of Holy Week and there are some things today I've always just expected! Such as, praying with the acolytes in the sacristy prior to the service! Handing out palm branches to the members of the congregation! The children singing "All Glory Laud and Honor" as we fix on our eyes on

the holy cross being led in procession to our King, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey” (Zech 9:9). But these are challenging times to rejoice greatly, aren’t they!

“I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider’s name was Death” (Rev. 6:8). That’s what Saint John the Evangelist saw in His revelation. A pale horse of pestilence and pandemic, whose rider’s name was Death. Isn’t that what we’re seeing as we’re all watching the numbers scroll across the screen of those infected and dying around the world from this virus. It’s devastating and deadly and we grieve for all those affected! We pray also for ourselves, that our trust and love of God would not waver or shake during this time, but instead grow and mature, as we live calmly in the promises of God, bringing forth the fruit of repentance and good works.

You see, we Christians believe that God has reasons for allowing such disasters to afflict the world at various times. Remember when the Lord sent fiery serpents to the unbelieving Israelites? Remember how they bit the people until they cried out “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord?” Remember the idolatry and wickedness of Israel and the Babylonian exile? Remember Daniel’s prayer of repentance? “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You” (Dan. 9).

Folks, no one can say we don’t deserve this! When it comes to this pandemic there is something all Christians folks need to deal with head on. You can indulge in whatever story or conspiracy theory you fancy when it comes to this virus and its origin, but you can’t escape this one

fact: I believe in God the Father, Almighty maker of heaven and earth! We confess that God reigns absolutely and is in control of everything, every tiny molecule. We don't watch this virus wreak its havoc as innocent bystanders. No way. We watch it as guilty perpetrators because quite simply this is what sin has unleashed upon our world.

We have those readings throughout the church year on the various healings of lepers and we have a hard time imagining their plight. But no more! Now we get a real feel for it. Just watch as your neighbors cover their faces from you and cross the street. Never before have the words of Isaiah felt so much like our own: "Woe is me! For I am ruined. I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Is. 6).

God sends disasters and pandemics according to His own wisdom for His own purposes. We run away from that truth or try to hide from it with our 24/7 news cycle but we can't escape it. Let me give you an example. Yesterday, I stopped by Aldis on Capital Drive to pick up some groceries (I am hoping to limit my exposure the next couple weeks during the peak period of contagion). And you've seen it. You know what I'm talking about. Folks are wearing masks and gloves. You can feel the anxiety in the air. But that's not all! As I'm waiting in the checkout line the lights went out. The whole store went dark. Combined with everything else going on, the circumstance, and the collective experience, even I, briefly felt like this might very well be the moment of deliverance that all of us have been longing for, or for others, dreading. A few screamed. I made the sign of the cross. The lady next to me outdid me some and yelled out a real beauty, "O Lord Jesus, save me!"

Not a bad prayer for Palm Sunday actually! Ironically, those are the same exact words that the folks shouted when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday. "Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!" What does Hosanna mean anyways? Well, it's a Hebrew word

meaning “save us now!” That woman next to me in line recognized that whatever was going on, whatever might be suffered or endured, or, whatever age was then being closed out, Jesus was in control of it all and willing and eager to save.

Behold, your King is coming to you . . . humble and mounted on a donkey. His kingly crown is not made of gold but of thorns, the sign of sin’s curse. Behold His royal reign, bearing the curse for His people and saving us from our sins.

There was another time when all the lights went out. It was when Jesus was dying on the cross to save sinful man. For three hours darkness covered the whole earth and Jesus cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” There He was bearing that deadly sickness of man’s sin, until his lungs caved in from respiratory failure and He breathed His last and yielded up His Spirit.

The temple curtain was torn in two. The whole earth shook violently, and the rock were split. The tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the tombs at Jesus’ resurrection. In the depths of the darkness and death of this devastating time, the greater Light of the Resurrected Christ shines forth even now! Easter is just around the corner where life triumphs over death. Free from sin! Free from virus and free from the grave!

In humble repentance we cry out to the very God who promised to bring deliverance from sin, death, and the devil. Our confidence is in the God who has provided the sacrifice for our sin, redemption for His people. Learn from those Israelites in the wilderness stung by the epidemic of fiery serpents. Our Lord put it this way, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” Look to the cross! Look to the Body nailed to that tree - payment for our redemption. Look to the blood there that is shed for you for our healing and restoration.

Someday again soon, things will go dark, but that will just give way to eternal light and gladness which will have no end. Jesus Himself testifies to these things and says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

For the Holy Church as she marks Holy Week, especially for those who are not able to gather in person, that we would rejoice greatly over our King, who saved us with His perfect life and sacrificial death, and who comes to us humbly and continually in His Holy Word and Sacraments, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For our Christian lives, that we would be granted faithfulness in times of temptation, repentance and forgiveness when we fall, love for all our brothers and sisters in Christ, reconciliation with those from whom we are alienated, and boldness to confess the faith we have in Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the members of this congregation, that we would be given faithful and generous hearts to prayerfully and financially support the mission and ministry of our Lord in this place and abroad, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all whom our Father has given authority in civil governments, especially Donald, our President, and Tony, our Governor, that He would guide their decisions and desires so that life is defended, justice upheld and the will of Him before whom all knees will bow is done, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who live without faith in Christ, that the Holy Spirit would call them to repentance and give them the gift of faith to believe in the One who comes in the name of the Lord, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those stricken by disease, especially the novel coronavirus; for those enduring famine, unemployment, scarcity and other disaster; for those in bondage; and for the lonely, isolated, fearful and those in any need, that our heavenly Father would hear our pleas and spare us, leading us to rejoice in Him who never fails us in our time of need, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the family of Dorothea Ede, who has fallen asleep in the arms her Savior. Grant all who mourn comfort in their sorrow as they give thanks for Christ's victory over sin and death on the cross and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who receive the Holy Supper of our Lord today, that they would eat His body and drink His blood in repentance and faith, and be strengthened to love others as Christ has loved them; and for those who long to receive the Sacrament but are unable for a time, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who have departed this vale of tears in faith and now sleep in Jesus, let us give thanks to the Lord; that He would shepherd us in that same faith until our last hour, bringing us, with them, into His Kingdom, which has no end, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn of the Day: 438 A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth



1 A Lamb goes un - com - plain - ing forth, The
 2 This Lamb is Christ, the soul's great friend, The
 3 "Yes, Fa - ther, yes, most will - ing - ly I'll
 4 Lord, when Your glo - ry I shall see And



guilt of sin - ners bear - ing And, lad - en with the
 Lamb of God, our Sav - ior, Whom God the Fa - ther
 bear what You com - mand Me. My will con - forms to
 taste Your king - dom's plea - sure, Your blood my roy - al



sins of earth, None else the bur - den shar - ing; Goes
 chose to send To gain for us His fa - vor. "Go
 Your de - cree, I'll do what You have asked Me." O
 robe shall be, My joy be - yond all mea - sure! When



pa - tient on, grows weak and faint, To slaugh - ter led with -
 forth, My Son," the Fa - ther said, "And free My chil - dren
 won - drous Love, what have You done! The Fa - ther of - fers
 I ap - pear be - fore Your throne, Your righ - teous - ness shall



out com - plaint, That spot - less life to of - fer, He bears the
 from their dread Of guilt and con - dem - na - tion. The wrath and
 up His Son, De - sir - ing our sal - va - tion. O Love, how
 be my crown; With these I need not hide me. And there, in



stripes, the wounds, the lies, The mock - er - y, and
 stripes are hard to bear, But by Your pas - sion
 strong You are to save! You lay the One in -
 gar - ments rich - ly wrought, As Your own bride shall



yet re - plies, "All this I glad - ly suf - fer."
 they will share The fruit of Your sal - va - tion."
 to the grave Who built the earth's foun - da - tion."
 we be brought To stand in joy be - side You.