

Holy Week - The News Delivered

April 5, 2020

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Gary James

Philippians 2:5-11

We begin with prayer: *O Lord strengthen us for the days ahead, that we may bear witness to Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus who is the Christ. Amen.

There you are awaiting a decision on a critical question – project – or maybe even a very special relationship when someone comes up to you and says, I have good news and bad news – which do you want first. Or, here we are today amidst a seemingly unending 24/7 bad news story – certainly looking for someone to say I have some good news. Yes, our lives in settled and unsettled times, are regularly dealing with good news/bad news situations.

So, as we begin Holy Week with thoughts of swaying palms – and waving hands at home – have you ever stopped to consider that the original events of Holy Week, what happened from Palm Sunday to Good Friday, just possibly might be one of those good news/bad news situations? Most certainly the good news is that Jesus Christ reached the peak of his popularity, riding in a triumphal procession into the holy city of Jerusalem. There was a huge, spontaneous parade, which was prophesied 500 plus years earlier in Zechariah – the 9th chapter – ***“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, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*** There were adoring masses, thronging crowds, everybody turned out, the disciples were very impressed, and the Pharisees and the Sadducees realized that they had underestimated this simple Galilean teacher. Riding this crest of public approval, Jesus rode that donkey right to the Temple, the very center of the Jewish faith, and began to teach and preach. From Sunday to Thursday Jesus was unstoppable. His enemies tried to trick him several times – but to no avail; each time he turned the tables on them and exposed their

treachery. They thought about arresting him but were afraid of what the people would do. No one even seriously complained when he overturned the tables of the money-changers.

And of course, in this same period Jesus set the tone for His church – washing His own disciples' feet giving them – and us – a New Commandment, ". . . **love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.**" He instituted the Lord's Supper and provided us the power to be His disciples, doing His work, in the world today.

Yes indeed, the good news is that from Sunday to Thursday Jesus was unstoppable. So, what's the bad news? On Thursday he was betrayed and arrested, and on Friday he was hung on a cross and killed. Today the palms – tomorrow the passion – good news/bad news. Unlike the many good news/bad news jokes, there's nothing funny about the fact that he rode through the streets of Jerusalem to the shouts of "**Hosanna,**" "**Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord,**" and shouts of, "**Crucify him,**" just five days later. Everybody's hero became an object of scorn and hatred, a bloody sacrifice.

Is there anything we can learn from this? Of course there is – generally speaking, it has been customary to focus on the experience of the people around Jesus throughout the week and using what they say and do to come up with messages that may sound like this: "*Don't be a Sunday only Christian. Don't wave your palm branches today, and then forget all about Jesus and your mission tomorrow. Be faithful and see yourself as Jesus' loyal follower every day, every moment, of your life.*" It is a solid message, but today, just for a moment, let's put ourselves in Jesus' place, rather than in the shoes of those around Him. What was Christ's experience on His good news/bad news journey from Palm Sunday to Good Friday?

Paul gives us some excellent insight in our text when he writes – "***Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***"

Did you hear that? "***He emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant . . . he humbled himself . . . becoming obedient to death.***" Think about it – He

humbled Himself – becoming obedient to death – on a cross. These things remind us of something that’s easy to forget when we always put ourselves in the crowd’s shoes on Palm Sunday and wondering ***“where were their hearts.”*** Paul’s words remind us that Jesus intentionally chose His path. He chose to leave the safety of Galilee as we saw in His deliberate choice to go to Mary and Martha and raise Lazarus from the dead. He chose to confront the powers of darkness right where they were most powerful.

What this "choosing" means is that all the uphill/downhill, good news/bad news, palms one day/passion the next, really had nothing to do with what Jesus was about. Jesus knew the purpose of His life – to be our Savior, not a celebrity. He knew saving required sacrifice – the sacrifice of not being able to do what He would have always preferred to do – as demonstrated in His prayer in the Garden – the sacrifice of living life for others, not for Himself, and ultimately the sacrifice of Himself on a cross that everyone else but Him deserved. He knew this was the only way for sinners to be saved and no issue of popularity or acceptance could deter Him from it.

Jesus came to Jerusalem neither excited nor deceived by the applause of the crowds. He didn’t allow Himself to get depressed over the treachery, the desertion, the seemingly complete reversal of fortune He would endure. Jesus knew what would happen to Him – He even knew what would happen to others, like Judas, Peter and the rest of his disciples. In both popular acclaim – and in denial and rejection – Jesus made it plain to everyone that He was not swayed by the feelings or events of the moment, but rather was walking step by step along a path which fulfilled the Heavenly Father’s will, for Him and through Him, for all the world. It didn’t matter if the path seemed to reach a peak from which there was no way to go but down. Jesus knew that His goal was not the top of the mountain – not popularity – not power – not applause. It didn’t matter that the path clearly led into, and appeared to end in, the valley of the shadow of death. No, regardless of appearances, regardless of the popularity that Jesus found, and regardless of the suffering that He knew He would undergo, Jesus chose to be true to His mission, He chose to be obedient; and He walked the path to its end.

And what happened? As we read in our text – ***“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to***

the glory of God the Father." It's a lesson for all of us to remember. Or as Paul puts it, "***Have this mind – this attitude – among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.***" If we depend upon the mountain top events of life to give us reward and satisfaction, we may never achieve the joy of victory, but rather experience the bitter taste of defeat. If we make money, health, security, or even family, define us, we may, indeed, find ourselves with plenty of everything. But good old gravity shows us that what goes up must come down. And, even if you do reach the top, that leaves only one way to go in the weeks, months, and years ahead. It's like being on a roller coaster – there is a long ride to the top, but after you reach the top, comes a rapid and scary descent.

On the other hand, we – like Christ – have the opportunity to walk our own unique path of obedience to God. It's a path which may see us surrounded by enjoyment, possessions, popularity, and a loving family, or it may lead us into loneliness, misunderstanding, and poverty. But none of these things – good or bad – define or influence where the path is headed. Whether the path is uphill or downhill, good news and/or bad news, walking it with the attitude of Christ Jesus, an attitude of faith, we realize it is the final destination that counts. Because, after all, the journey from Palm Sunday to Good Friday wasn't just a good news/bad news story. There was the final Good News which redeemed it – and most certainly us too. Jesus rose from the dead on Easter, and because of that God can take any situation – no matter how bad it seems, even if it is the day of our own death, and use it to move us closer to our final destination.

You and I for the foreseeable future are going to continue to deal with the bitter struggles of lockdown – discomfiting news – and the realities of the world as it exists today. But just as Joseph got through the many – too many – dreadful valley experiences of his life – we too will see many more sweet successes, and yes, more disappointments. But what saves you and me from having to helplessly ride a roller coaster over these ups and downs, what frees us from the tyranny of events which could otherwise throw us off stride is our faith in Christ Jesus. His obedience, love, and power urge us to press forward in our own obedience to God.

Faith trusts Easter is coming. Faith knows that meaning in life is found when we choose to follow the path God has marked out for us – a path first followed by our Savior – Jesus Christ – through all that life has to offer, and then through the grave into the eternal life of heaven.

Just as Christ knew the blessing His destination would give to the world – the grace-filled joy of life eternal – may that same attitude focus your comings and goings as you faithfully travel the ups and downs, peaks and valleys, highs and lows – good news and bad news of your journey. Always understanding in no uncertain terms that God is in control and with each of us each and every day because just as He sent the Son He loved to save us – He loves us too. Amen.

Note: Portions of the sermon are adaptations from a sermon delivered by Rev. Christopher Radford.

