

"The Parade: A Place of Coronation"

Luke 19:37-38

March 20, 2016

Palm Sunday

Unless you live under a rock and possess no social media at all (including television and newspaper), you realize that our country is again going through the once every four year process to choose a president. I think most people want a strong leader and honest leader – someone who can defeat our enemies and bring prosperity.

The process has been unusually raucous this time. There have been loud rallies with lots of yelling and some violence. People's frustrations are boiling over. People are tired of the status quo. They want someone new, an outsider, to take control from the insiders and lead. People want someone – anyone – to take up the power, fix our country, and solve our problems.

As we continue our Lenten journey and visit *The Places of the Passion*, we arrive today at a huge parade, a religious demonstration, and a political rally all rolled into one and all in honor of Jesus. There is a huge crowd of supporters and curious onlookers. Thousands of religious pilgrims have flocked to Jerusalem for Passover, swelling the population of Jerusalem which was an already large and crowded city.

Jesus' "motorcade" (or "animalcade", if you will) consists of a donkey's colt. He rides on it to symbolize, according to the prophets, both royalty and humility. He receives the "red carpet treatment" as people cast down their garments on the road for the donkey to walk on. The people wave palm branches which had both religious and political overtones. And they shout slogans and Scriptures as loudly and passionately as any slogans heard at an American political rally.

Luke, whose Gospel we have been following in our Lenten journey, says that it is Jesus' disciples who are leading the shouting, not the crowd in general. They "rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen." They knew Jesus would make a great king for they had seen some very mighty works: healing the sick, feeding the masses, exorcising demons, and raising the dead. The disciples probably expected more of the same mighty works and even greater works after they made Jesus king.

So, they shouted out, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" This was the King who could do it! This was the Messiah whom the prophets promised! This was the man who could free them. They were tired of the status quo – the oppressive rule by Rome – and wanted change. All Jesus had to do was take up His power, fix their country, and solve their problems. All they had to do was have a great coronation service, give Him a crown, place Him on a throne, and things would start to happen.

But nothing happens! Jesus enters Jerusalem, makes a visit to the Temple (where He cleanses it), and continues on teaching (a bit controversially). There's no coronation, no exercise of power, and no change. We may feel a bit cheated because of this as I'm sure the parade pilgrims felt that day. Did we miss something? Or is Jesus not the King and Messiah promised?

The truth of the matter is that He is the King and there was a coronation. But Jesus is a unique King with a unique coronation which came at the end of the week instead of at the beginning of the week. His coronation began with this joyful parade and rally of which we read today. It continued on through betrayal, denial, and much sorrow and suffering. It concluded on Friday with a sorrowful parade from Jerusalem to Golgotha where He was given a crown – a crown made of thorns; placed on a throne – a heavy wooden cross; and received His coronation documents above His head: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Instead of taking up powers as a mighty king would, Jesus gave up power as a humble king should.

He had to do this for us because we had needs far greater than the political, economical, and material needs which so often plague us. As bad as those are, they are but a symptom of a far more serious problem – the wrath of a holy God against sin. In our casual society dominated by moral relativity and a "can't we just get along" philosophy, we may forget that our God is holy; that He requires us to be holy; and that He holds us accountable when we are not. God's wrath burns hotly against sin and He must punish it and get rid of it.

We have sin. It is in our very nature. It is reflected in our life and actions. We sin in our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions. We sin in the evil we do. We sin in the good which we fail to do. We are guilty and earn God's wrath and punishment. Our best efforts at reform are not enough. Each of us is doomed to die, face the wrath of God and be relegated to an eternity in hell.

What king or ruler on earth could possibly fix this situation? We watch our elected leaders and those running for office try to solve the political, economical, and material problems of this life without success. They claim the need for more power, control, or more money in order to succeed. Yet when they get more power, more control, and more money, the problems still remain. How can we trust the mightiest leader or the most powerful king to fix the problems that are even worse – death, the wrath of God, and hell? We can't.

Jesus is the perfect King for this situation and need, but He is a unique and out of the ordinary kind of king as well. He takes up power needed to overcome these problems by becoming weak. As our Epistle lesson says, although He is true God, Jesus did not hold to His divine power, but set aside that power and became nothing. He humbled Himself by becoming a human being. He further humbled Himself by taking on the form of a servant. Imagine that! The divine king becomes a human servant – a servant who does not rule but is so obedient that He is willing to face death when called on to do so by His Father in heaven, even if it means death on a cross.

To many, even the Palm Sunday pilgrims, Jesus's kingship seemed to be a failure because it runs so contrary to our idea of kingship. The pilgrims at the Palm Sunday parade wept as they went on a different parade that Friday to Golgotha. They thought He was merely going to die as a failure. But it's so much more than that. He was going to be coronated as King and succeed for you, for me, and for all people.

Jesus showed strength through apparent weakness. By going to Golgotha instead of a palace and to a wooden cross instead of a golden throne, Jesus was strong enough to bear the sin of the world – your sin, my sin, all the wrong we've done in thought, word, and deed and all the good we have failed to do in thought, word, and deed – upon His shoulders. Our record before God was cleansed because Jesus' record was full of our sin.

Jesus was able to claim victory through an apparent defeat. By staying on the cross and dying for us instead of coming down off the cross and living for Himself, Jesus claimed the victory over sin, Satan, and hell. He stood between us and God, absorbing the wrath of God against your sin and my sin which He was now bearing to protect us from it. He took the full blow of hell in our place to save us from it. As the Bible says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

Jesus was able to bring life out of death. By coming out of the tomb three days later and living instead of remaining in the tomb dead, Jesus was able to put the final nail in the coffin of death. He was able to conquer death, not only for Himself but for all who have been joined to Him through Holy Baptism and live in Him by faith. At our funerals, death only appears to win but it is a defeated foe. When we die, we still live in the presence of our King. On the Last Day, our bodies will rise from their graves and be joined again with our souls to live eternally in the heavenly kingdom.

This election year is a good time to be reminded not to trust earthly kings and rulers too much. They promise great things but often don't deliver, can't deliver, or deliver only in a limited and temporary way. Even at their best, earthly rulers and kings can only deal with the things of this world which are passing away anyway.

Follow the true King, Jesus Christ. Like the disciples on Palm Sunday, "rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works [you] have seen" here. You have seen God receive people into His Kingdom by Holy Baptism. You have seen people confess their sins and receive God's forgiveness. You have seen our Lord's body and blood here on our altar under bread and wine and received by people for the strengthening of their faith. You have seen God call people into His heavenly kingdom as their caskets are carried from the church to a temporary stay in a grave.

These are all mighty works, extraordinary works, eternal works which Jesus has obtained by His work as king. Follow that king. His path is a long and lonely one, often filled with, sorrow, pain and suffering as we shall see this Holy Week. But it is the only path that leads past suffering, sorrow, pain, disappointment and even death through to joy, pleasure, peace, and the crown of life in heaven waiting for us and all who are faithful until death. The Lord grant that to us all. Amen.