

SERMON

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our mediation this morning is the Gospel according to Saint John the twelfth chapter verses twelve through nineteen.

Boys and Girls, I am glad to see you this morning. Do you have a favorite baseball team? football team? basketball team? What do you say when your team wins? How about, “We’re number one!” “We’re the best!” “Hip, hip, hooray!”

Do you know what people said to Jesus on Palm Sunday? It was kind of like, “You’re number one!” “You’re the best!” “Hip, hip, hooray!” Instead, though, they said, “Hosanna.” The Bible says the crowds went before Jesus and followed Jesus shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Even the King of Israel!”

Hosanna means “save us now!” It’s one way to say to Jesus, “You’re number one!” The people waved palm branches, too. Palm branches, back in Jesus’ day, symbolized victory. “Jesus is in first place!” “Jesus is the King of Israel!”

Who was Jesus about to defeat? That’s right. There were three big, mean enemies on the other team—sin, Satan, and death. How was Jesus going to defeat that team? How was Jesus going to be number one? How was Jesus going to become first? Ponder these

question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seat and those who love you.

Christ is indeed number one forever and ever, but you would never have known it when He rode in on that Palm Sunday. Christ's Palm Sunday parade into Jerusalem wasn't the only parade Jerusalem had ever seen. Roman historians tell us that the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, regularly held military parades—parades of Roman cavalry and soldiers who marched into the city of Jerusalem.

From the western side of the city, the opposite side from which Jesus would enter, Pontius Pilate would lead Roman soldiers on horseback and on foot. Each soldier would be clad in leather armor polished to a high gloss. On each soldier's head, hammered helmets would gleam in the bright sunlight. At their sides, sheathed in their scabbards, were swords crafted from the hardest steel; in their hands, each soldier would carry a spear. Or if he was an archer, he carried a bow with a sling of arrows across his back. Drummers would beat out the cadence of the march. The message was clear. Peace came through Roman might and power. Historians call it *Pax Romana*—Roman peace.

The people expected Peace. They wanted Jewish Peace through Jesus. That is shown in what Jesus came riding in on. “And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, ‘Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!’ ” (John 12:14–15). In antiquity, horses and chariots, not donkeys, brought victory on the battlefield! In 2

Kings 2:12; 13:14, horses and chariots are proverbial for ultimate power. But Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a *donkey*. Not a warhorse, not a stallion. He has no chariots, no army, no sword, no helmet, and no spear. What is Jesus thinking?

No wonder John writes, “His disciples did not understand these things” (John 12:16). They didn’t have a clue! And it shows throughout John’s Gospel.

Let me give you a few examples: (1) The master of the Cana wedding feast doesn’t realize where the wine has come from (John 2:9). (2) Jews believe Jesus will rebuild the temple in three literal days (John 2:20). (3) Nicodemus thinks Jesus is talking about a literal second birth (John 3:4, 9). (4) The Samaritan woman misconstrues Jesus’ reference to “living water” (John 4:10–15). (5) The crowd wants to make Jesus an earthly king (John 6:15). (6) “Not even His brothers believed in Him” (John 7:5). (7) People are confused concerning Jesus’ Bethlehem birth (John 7:41–42). (8) The disciples misconstrue Jesus’ reference to Lazarus having “fallen asleep” (John 11:11–13). (9) Peter, by cutting off Malchus’s ear, shows that he fails to understand Jesus’ plan to go to the cross (John 18:10–11). (10) Mary Magdalene does not recognize Jesus (John 20:14–15). (16)

That’s quite a list! It reminds me of a story Art Holst used to tell. Holst was a referee in the NFL. During one game, Kansas City Chiefs tight end Fred Arbanas was tackled so hard that his artificial eye popped out. After a search, the missing eye was found. Arbanas popped it back into place, declined the coach’s

offer to send in a sub, and was eager to resume play. Holst playfully said to Arbanas, “Fred, I’m impressed. But what if you had lost the other eye?” “That’s easy,” snapped Arbanas. “I’d become a referee!” Referees aren’t the only ones who are blind. So are people throughout John’s Gospel. So are we!

Let’s face it. Are we any different? There are times when we are spiritually blind because we want a different Savior. A Savior who can instantly right our wrongs, heal our hurts, and miraculously deliver us from disease and all sorts of doom and gloom. A Savior that gives only sweetness and light, happiness and heaven without requiring us to do any hard work.

Sounds good right? But how does that Savior come about? Betrayal and death. Judas betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver. Peter used a sword in Gethsemane to strike the high priest’s servant. All of the disciples abandoned the Savior. Finally, by Friday, most of the Jews ended up rejecting Jesus, crying, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

No wonder that by Friday, Jesus was hanging under a sign indicating why Rome executed him: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (Matthew 27:37). Looking for a king who had pomp and power, people missed seeing that God offers lasting, enduring peace through the King riding on a donkey heading to die.

And this is the kind of peace we need! The Savior’s shed blood makes peace so that through faith alone we have peace *with* God (Romans 5:1) as well as the peace *of* God (Philippians 4:7). God

delivers this peace in concrete ways in specific places—in the Gospel proclaimed, in Holy Baptism, and in the Lord’s Supper.

I’ve met people who say, “I made my peace with the man upstairs.” What they really mean is that they have a cease-fire with God. “God, You stay on Your side of the fence, and I’ll stay on mine. God, You stay up in heaven and do Your thing, and I’ll stay on earth and do my thing. God, if You don’t bother me, I won’t bother You!” That’s not having peace with God. That’s having a cease-fire with God. God offers so much more! He offers a relationship!

A relationship made by the Savior shedding His blood. Stand beneath the cross and receive these beautiful promises, all found in John’s Gospel. “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you” (John 14:27). “I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). “Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’ ” (John 20:19).

Peace because Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. Peace because He suffers, bleeds, and dies Christ’s disciples didn’t stay in the dark about Palm Sunday forever. John writes, “His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about Him and had been done to Him” (John 12:16). The disciples finally understood the peace of Jesus and—by the presence and

power of the Holy Spirit—so shall we! And we will not just understand it, but we will also receive it and share it and live it.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.