

Sixth Sunday in Lent; Palm Sunday; Confirmation Sunday; April 2, 2023

Zechariah 9:9-10

Our Humble Kings Rides to Win Peace

**Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion!
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
Look! Your King is coming to you.
He is righteous and brings salvation.
He is humble and is riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the horse from Jerusalem.
The battle bow will be taken away,
and he will proclaim peace to the nations.
His kingdom will extend from sea to sea,
from the River to the ends of the earth.**

Have you ever done one of those word association tests? Someone – usually a psychologist or researcher of some kind – says a word, and you say the first word that comes to your mind when you hear it. “Washington.” And your answer: Maybe “President,” or “General,” or “Traffic” reveals something about your mind. Try this one: “King.” Whatever the first word into your mind was, I’d bet dollars to doughnuts that it wasn’t “humble.”

About three thousand years ago, there was a king named Azitawada. He wrote about himself: “In my time, my people enjoyed all the best things of life...I conquered all the land no one else had conquered. I am the greatest gift of all for my people.” About a thousand years later, another king named Augustus said this about himself: “I am the author of the best form of government in history.” And then there was Louis XIV: “Even if I wanted to make a mistake, I could not.”

There is a King who can rightfully say all those things about himself. There is a King who gives all the best gifts to his people, conquers what no one else can conquer, rules the best kingdom in history, and makes no mistakes. His name is Jesus Christ.

Today, our King Jesus arrives in Jerusalem five days ahead of his brutal death, and one week ahead of his resurrection. As our King arrives in the holy city, he makes it quite clear that he is no ordinary king. Humility is not a foreign concept to him. In fact, as St. Paul wrote so beautifully to the Christians in Philippi, he is pure humility.

2,000 years ago, a king riding a donkey was akin to a billionaire driving a 2012 Accord. In both cases, the person is clearly unconcerned with projecting their strength. Jesus comes humbly because Zechariah prophesied that he would. But he also comes humbly because he is coming to fight a different kind of battle. Without troops or swords, he is coming to fight against the devil and against sin and against death. And he is going to win.

In order to fight that battle and win it, he must lay aside his power and glory, and so he does. He does it because the most important thing to him is not his own power and honor and prestige. The most

important thing to him is you and I and every person in this world. He wants to fight and free us from those enemies and give us peace that lasts for eternity.

Last Sunday we used a section of Luther's Large Catechism to confess our faith. It was an explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed, which summarizes the saving work of Jesus. In that section, Luther vividly described our enemies as "jailers" and "tyrants." Those words are not only vivid, they are accurate. Sin, death, and Satan not only controlled us. They exploited and tormented us. Without Jesus, there is no true spiritual peace. There is no certainty where you will spend eternity; there is no sure hope that your life will extend beyond seventy years, or eighty, if you have the strength; there is guilt for sins, and the fear that it will be punished in the world to come.

But Jesus takes all that away. He rides humbly to replace all that with peaceful confidence. His ride into Jerusalem is both the end and the beginning. It is nearing the end of his three decades of perfection that our King lived in the place of all his subjects, to make them holy like him in the eyes of God. And it is also the beginning of his week-long march to the hill just outside Jerusalem's walls, where he will suffer and die to pay for all their sins. Other kings come with a show. This one comes humbly because he is on a mission to bring his perfect life to a close and humble himself even to death on a cross.

Jesus is coming to save. And that is peace. In Jesus we know that Satan's head is crushed. We are free from him. Our sins are gone. And so is our guilt and our fear of punishment. And we know that we will follow Jesus out of the grave. So not even death torments us anymore; it is the door to eternal peace in Jesus' heavenly kingdom.

Jesus' kingdom is also in our hearts. His peace is so lovely and deep that he conquered our hearts with it. Jesus is not a king who forces people to follow him. He touches them gently with peaceful waters and peaceful words, and his Spirit opens the door to their hearts and Jesus sits down softly on the throne of their hearts.

And his peace is too powerful to stay in Jerusalem where he wins it. Remember Zechariah's words: **The battle bow will be taken away, and he will proclaim peace to the nations. His kingdom will extend from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.** It was once said of the British Empire that the sun never set on it. Once. Now it is about the size of Texas. That is what eventually happens to every kingdom, including Azitawada's Phoenicia, Augustus' Rome, and Louis's France. But not Jesus'. His conquering peace has spread to countless hearts around the world, as well as hearts that already rest in eternal peace.

That day will come for us, too, and for the whole world, when our King returns. Then we will see the fulfillment of everything our King rides into Jerusalem to win. The peace will be reality not only in our souls, but everywhere. We do have his peace now, knowing where we stand with God. But we live in a world where peace around us is often hard to find. Where there is sin and unbelief, there is bound to be conflict between friends, family members, political factions, and entire nations. But this King will bring the day when all that ends. No sibling rivalries and classroom conflict or workplace tension or missile tests or invasions. **I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The battle bow will be taken away.**

Until that day comes, the hearts ruled by Jesus' and peace must strive to show it among themselves. Jesus promises conflict between believers and unbelievers, but commands his subjects to be at peace with each other. And one key to living Jesus' peace is to live with his humble mindset. As St. Paul reminds us, Jesus'

humility is also our example. We were more important to him than his own status and well-being. The more we watch our Savior's humble work to free *us* from jailers and tyrants, the more we will think of the good of others before our own. And the more we do that, the more peaceful our time with each other will be, until we reach the place of perfect peace.

And, before we finish, we must listen to Zechariah's joyful encouragement: **Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!** During this coming Holy Week, sadness tempers our great rejoicing and shouting, as we watch our beloved Savior suffer greatly what we deserved to suffer. But even during Holy Week, underneath that sorrow we know how the story ends. Jesus wins our peace by routing our enemies. Keep the joy – quiet as it is this week. And when the day of Jesus' victory over death arrives, shout it loud and clear. Rejoice greatly.

This is a busy Sunday. It is also Confirmation Sunday. When only person is being confirmed, it's a bit awkward to preach the entire sermon as a confirmation message. But, Patrick, it is all true for you. Jesus has freed you, given you peace that passes understanding, and gently entered your heart to rule. This peace and joy is for you. And, thank God, you know that. May you always keep your eyes on your Savior who rides so humbly into Jerusalem today. May you return every day to his loving victory, and always look forward to the peace of heaven. Live out the humility of your Savior, in peace with all his people.

I hope God gives you many good things for the rest of your life. But you already have the best thing God ever gave to anyone. It is what he gave to the whole world: his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. This truth gives peace forever, the peace our humble King wins for us. Amen.