

Passion Sunday  
Matthew 27:11-54

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, we celebrate the majestic entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem. This fulfils the prophecy in Zechariah, "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." (9.9) The crowds recognized this fulfillment of prophecy and shouted: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest.!" (Mt 21:9) Hosanna means "save us now." What is Jesus saving the crowd, and consequently you, from?

Death!

What is death?

Death is the righteous judgment of God upon sin. Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and suffered the consequences of God's judgment. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gn 3:19) You are born in Adam's image (Gn 5:3) and inherit the same dreadful condition. You're born curved in upon yourself with original sin and you prove it in all manner of sins that spring forth from your naturally wicked heart. You are dust and to dust you shall return.

Death is man's enemy because man is the enemy of God and death is the righteous judgment of God against His enemies. But if God loved those who love Him (Mt 5:46), what would be the outcome of such love? You and I would be doomed to death by such a love. And not just a temporal death but death eternal!

“But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rm 5:8) In many and various ways, God promised salvation for us sinners, but in Zechariah, God puts it this way: He promises us a righteous King coming with salvation. That King rides into Holy Week humble and mounted on a donkey to face death for us and defeat it.

Jesus did not deserve death. He had no earthly father, so He didn't inherit Original Sin like you and I. He committed no sin. His heart was pure so the only thing that flowed out of it was grace and truth. (Jn 1:17) Even Pilate confessed that he found no guilt in Him. (Jn 18:38) He loved His Father in heaven and did His will.

Jesus says, “For this reason the Father loved me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” (Jn 10:17-18)

Death had no claim on Jesus. And because Jesus submitted Himself to death, He defeated death for all time. He defeated death for you. He gains the victory over death and gives it to you by grace alone through faith alone. You receive this victory through Baptism, Preaching, Holy Absolution, and the Lord's Supper.

You cannot receive this victory through your means. Neither through your works nor through your will. You receive it as a gift. And you continue to receive it as a gift. Paul admonishes the Galatians and any who try to grasp and keep salvation by works, “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal 3:2-2)

The means that Jesus established are the way He delivers the Word that leads to faith. Jesus mandated ordinary men to proclaim His Word and ordinary elements to be combined with His Word for receiving the gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Death reminds you of what's important. The reason that COVID-19 is so serious is that it brings death in its wake. Death is the reminder that we are dust and that we need to be saved from this world of dust and death.

The devil does everything in his power to distract you from death.

The modern world has helped the devil in distracting you from death. It is so far removed from most of us. People rarely die at home anymore. They go off to Hospice or Hospitals or Nursing Homes to die. Animals slaughtered for daily meals do not die in our backyards. Graveyards are no longer at the church that you pass and see with regularity, but in some remote well manicured place out of sight in your day to day life. Death in movies, television, and video games has become cartoonish enough to remove the full sting of death from your personal life.

On top of that the devil distracts you with riches, poverty, Facebook, Youtube, Netflix, television, video games, sports, rock 'n' roll, radio, concerts, plays, musicals, comedy, sex, drugs, alcohol, books, comics, graphic novels, etc, etc, etc. The list really could go on and on, couldn't it? These things, in and of themselves, are not wicked, but the devil sure is successful in distracting you, isn't he?

Repent!

You must grapple with your own death before you can truly live.

And to grapple with death, you must grapple with Jesus, your Creator and Judge.

The crowd in our Gospel reading didn't want to grapple with Jesus: "Let Him be crucified!" (v. 22, 23) and "His Blood be on us and our children." (v. 25) They just wanted Him gone.

When they said, "His Blood be on us," they meant they would take the guilt before God of crucifying the author of life! That is the guilt that leads to eternal death.

When you ignore Jesus, you bear that same guilt!

However, you also must say, "His blood be on us and our children."

But you mean it in a much different way.

You want the blood of Jesus on you for the forgiveness of your sins. You want the blood of Jesus on you that covers you with His perfect righteousness. You want the blood of Jesus on you that delivers to you His Holy Spirit.

And then you will truly know how to live!

By God's Word, you will know how to live "in faith towards God and fervent love toward one another." (Post Communion Collect, LSB 201)

You will gladly say with Paul, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is better." (Phil 1:21-22a, 23)

Today we celebrate our King who has righteousness and salvation. We celebrate the victory over death our Lord freely gives us. And we celebrate the eternal life we now possess in Him.

May God richly bless you as you live and move and have your being in Him! (Acts 17:28)

In Jesus name! Amen.