

Psalms 118: 1-2, 19-29; St. Matthew 21: 1-11

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

Psalms 31: 9-16

Philippians 2: 5-11

St. Matthew 27: 11-54

Palm Sunday 2023.

---

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

Matthew 21: 9

It's usually easier for us to undertake a small thing than a big thing. It's easier for us to get a glass of juice from the fridge, than to host a banquet for 100 people. It's easier for us to walk to the grocery store, than to drive in downtown Tokyo, Japan...

Today, however, I want us to *step back*, and try to see the big picture – the whole picture – from *God's* perspective... Imagine that we are a bit like astronauts, flying above the earth, and seeing the entire planet earth through the spaceship window... Let's try to look at the big picture, from God's perspective...

Over 70 years ago, the English writer Dorothy Sayers wrote a little tract, called *The Greatest Drama Ever Told*. Her point is that being a follower of Jesus Christ is not simply a set of theological propositions in our *head* (although God has given us minds to use for his glory). Nor is being a follower of Christ primarily about being a nice person (although kindness is a good secondary virtue). The living God is not to be domesticated into *our* human priorities...

Instead, the journey of Holy Week is about *God*. It is a great divine drama, of the living God who sweeps into human history in the person of Jesus Christ, to change the trajectory of the whole world...

We begin today, as Israel's true King rides into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. The crowd is ecstatic with praise, not yet fully realizing that this wonderful young wandering rabbi is in fact the Son of God himself. It may surprise us – as it should – that the Messiah humbly sits humbly on a donkey, as he rides into Jerusalem...

The next scene in this cosmic drama this week comes with the institution of the Lord's Supper – Holy Communion... Once again we see a sign of Christ's humility – not by riding a donkey. Instead, the Son of God takes off his outer robe... and washes the disciples' feet as a servant!...

The next scene in the divine drama is Jesus' arrest, torture, and crucifixion. We want to turn away, but we should let our eyes rest on this scene for a moment: We see starkly the ugliness of humanity's rebellion. (We too were among the crowd, you see, shouting “Crucify him.” Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world – and that includes you and me...)

At the same time, we see God's magnificent reconciling work, through the offering of Jesus Christ himself, for a sinful humanity. To the first on-lookers, the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth appeared to be the climax of a spectacular failure. But we get it wrong so often, you see – in fact, the crucifixion is God's astonishing triumph...

We notice the humility of Jesus as he rides the donkey, and as he washes the disciples' feet. Do we also appreciate the humility of Jesus, the perfect illustration of God's nature – as he hangs suffering on the cross?... Our second reading summarizes it well, as Paul confesses that Jesus Christ,

Emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2: 7-8)

God humbled himself... In our relationships, we're to be humble about our accomplishments, and give the honour to God...

The crucifixion is not the end of the divine drama, however!... On the third day of his death, several women go to Christ's tomb, when to their astonishment they discover that his body is absent from the tomb! Jesus Christ is not dead, but alive!... The same Jesus who died dreadfully only a handful of hours ago, is radiant with new life. Slow to understand as they often are, his first followers come to realize not only that Jesus Christ is alive again *after* death, but that he shares this new life with all who respond to his gracious invitation...

So, it's going to be quite a week, this upcoming week! We're seeing God dramatically intervening in human history. We are not only observers of ancient history, but participants in the human story of our redemption...

This week begins with praise... A few minutes ago, we sang, "All glory, laud and honour, to you, Redeemer King." Praise is our recognizing, and proclaiming, how great God is, and all that means for our lives. Praise is recognizing and celebrating the wonderful spiritual reality of God's presence, mercy, and love, shown supremely through Jesus Christ...

Part of our learning to praise God well is also seeing ourselves in the right way. Not too little. But not too much either...

Beaten down and discouraged by life, there are some people who believe they are worthless... For example, in intimate partner violence, the woman – far more frequently, the woman – is told so often that she is worthless, that she got what was coming because it was her fault, that she is really very stupid – that the victim begins to believe that to be

the truth... In contrast, the fact of the matter is that all people have been made in the image of God, and while the reality of our significant imperfections are indeed a serious matter, absolutely none of us is worthless...

So, that's one danger – to think too little of ourselves...

Far more common, though, is that we tend to think *too much* of ourselves. We begin to think that it is by our own cleverness alone that we have whatever achievements we have made, and we fail to fully appreciate the human support we have received along the way, and most of all, we often overlook God's abiding presence and grace, to help us become the men and women we are all called to be...

Let's remember once again Christ riding on the donkey, washing the disciples' feet, and hanging on the cross. God Almighty – who surely deserves all the credit – by his very nature is humble and gracious, and you and I are called to be the same...

Praise is the antidote for thinking too little of ourselves, or too much. In praise, we focus on the wonder and the glory of *God*, through whom we are inheritors of eternal life.

May we give all the honour, all the praise, all the glory, to God the most holy Trinity. May we see ourselves in right relationship to him, and as we travel through the cosmic drama of Holy Week, may we appreciate even more deeply Christ's wonderful work for the whole world – even for us, some 2000 years later, and half a world away.

Thanks be to God. Hosanna! Amen...