

“See the Selfless Savior”

Does he look like a king to you? The man known to some at the time as the king of the Jews, Jesus of Nazareth, borrows a donkey and rides it through the streets into Jerusalem. Does that sound like a king to you? Don't kings have their own horses and chariots, with escorts of soldiers? Yet we watch and we listen. We see the crowds of people laying palm branches on the road in front of him. They take their cloaks off and lay them there on the road as well. We hear their shouts of “Hosannah” “Save us, Lord.”

It is a unique picture, that of Jesus on Palm Sunday. Each year we consider it, one week before Easter. There are glimpses of glory and grandeur, shouts of praise, but all are interspersed with the simple and the humble. The man rides a donkey and travels with fishermen and other common men.

This strange mix of glory and humility should not surprise us, because this mix of glory and humility defines who this man is. Our sermon text for today pulls back the curtain on this man, it gives us a behind the scenes look at Palm Sunday and other events of his life. It asks us to consider his very attitude, and it leads us to see our selfless Savior. Our selfless Savior humbled himself to die, and now he is exalted forever.

By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul writes, **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!”**

Here is a glimpse into the mystery of Jesus Christ. It is a mystery because there is no one else to whom we can compare him, and like so many spiritual truths, there is nothing in our experience that can help us understand. We know what we know only because God has revealed it to us in his Word.

Jesus is true God, **“being in very nature God,”** as our text says. Before his birth into the world on the first Christmas, before the creation of the world, before time even began, Jesus is and always was true God, one with the Father. As Jesus himself said, **“Before Abraham was, I am”** (John 8:58). We confessed with Christians throughout history the words of the Nicene Creed, “We believe in... Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made.” Who do we see in Jesus? We see God himself.

But there on the donkey Jesus does not appear to be God at all. Jesus is God in flesh. In the person of Jesus, God took on a human nature. He became also a true human being. And as the God-man, he did not come to impress people with his power or to show off. He willingly humbled himself. He still had almighty power, but he didn't make regular use of it. He still

deserved honor and glory as God, but he didn't demand it. We call this truth about Jesus his humiliation. That doesn't mean that he was embarrassed by what happened to him, but that he freely and willingly humbled himself.

While that may not sound like a king, it certainly doesn't sound like us either. People are not usually eager to humble themselves. They don't turn down honor and glory. In fact, we usually act in the opposite way. We seek out glory for ourselves. We like to impress people. We want to be noticed and praised. That's the sort of selfishness that's behind every sin. From Adam and Eve, who thought they could be like God by disobeying what God had said to us today who follow our own selfish desires rather than loving others as God asks of us. That's the selfish sinfulness for which we deserve God's harsh punishment.

But that same sin, that selfishness, is the very reason that Jesus humbled himself the way he did. He came to save us from our sins, and in order to do that, he had to become one of us. He had to be a human being to live under God's law, under the same demands of God under which we live. He came to take our sins on himself so that he could give us his salvation. Again, the words of the Creed sum it up nicely: "For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven...was incarnate...suffered death and was buried." He did it perfectly, for us.

He rode into Jerusalem that Palm Sunday because that is where he would die for us. This was the way to the cross for our selfless Savior.

And because he went that way, because he has forgiven our sins through faith in him, he invites us to follow his example. **"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."** What can you do to serve others? How can you humble yourself to help others? We don't do these things so that we can be saved; we do these things because we are saved. Jesus is our example and he is our strength.

Of course, the story of Jesus does not end with his humiliation. This Holy Week we watch as he humbles himself to be betrayed and mocked and spit on and killed. We see him humble himself even to the point of a gruesome criminal's death on a cross. But we are only one week away from Easter. Then we see him rise from the dead. We see him taking up again the regular use of his power and glory and majesty as God. We see his exaltation.

Paul writes, **"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."**

With his work of winning salvation for us complete, the God-man Jesus Christ was exalted above all things. As we confessed his humiliation, so in the Creed we also confess his exaltation: "On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end." Suddenly our selfless Savior looks more and more like the King he truly is and always was.

These words draw our attention to Judgment Day, when the exalted Jesus will return for all people to see in his power and glory and majesty. Every human being will see clearly that he is the Lord and true God. As Revelation tells us, **“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”** (Revelation 1:7).

On that day, Jesus will bring us with all believers to join him in the glory of heaven. Just as surely as he calls us to share in his humiliation during our lives on earth, so he also invites us to share in his exaltation. Paul wrote in one of his letters to Timothy about the exaltation of the Christian with Christ: **“Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him”** (2 Timothy 2:11-12).

It is a special week we commemorate this week. We see clearly our selfless Savior who humbled himself to face the death that we deserved. And we are reminded that he has been exalted forever. Let us listen to his call not only to see our selfless Savior, but also to follow him. Let us serve him and others in humility until we join him in the eternal joys of heaven. Hosanna! Save us Lord!