

Palm Sunday – 2023  
Isaiah 50:4-9a  
Philippians 2:5-11  
John 12:12-19

The King enters Jerusalem to establish His Kingdom. The King enters Jerusalem to die. No one knew it at the time, but that is the only way that His Kingdom will come. Blood is spilled to inaugurate Christ's reign and rule. A well-planned coronation is marked by the Divine Monarch being crowned and His holy flesh being nailed to a cross. Hosanna to the King. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

C.S. Lewis wrote a towering work of fiction titled *The Screwtape Letters*. It is literally a demonic story, a comical but serious novel about demons, two of them in particular. The dialogue takes place in hell between Screwtape, a senior demon, and Wormwood, Screwtape's nephew, a junior tempter. The story was written to expose how the devil works. The story was written for us to both examine ourselves and defend ourselves against the tactics of the evil one. Wormwood is tasked with corrupting a British man whom they refer to as "the Patient." But it's how Lewis depicts hell which has our interest today. Hell is portrayed as a bureaucracy. Brilliant! Lewis said that he much preferred bats to bureaucrats. Rest assured; he didn't much care for bats. Hell as a bureaucracy, called the "lowerarchy;" hell as a police state, a community held together by fear and greed; that is a brilliant insight.

Man governing man; how has that gone? Two other works of fiction deserve mentioning. *Lord of the Flies* is a nightmare of a novel. The plot centers around a group of British boys stranded on an uninhabited island and their attempts to govern themselves. Groupthink, unhinged protocols, tribal dysfunction – it all runs rampant among the boys, ultimately resulting in death. The other germane fiction is the Borg from the Star Trek saga. The Borg is an alien, cyborg race that has a hive mind called "The Collective." They conscript everyone in their path and assimilate them, turning them into automatons, completely submissive to an all-consuming state. Resistance is futile is their mantra. These works of fiction aren't fanciful notions of impossibility. Man governing man can be a frightful thing.

"Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt" (John 12:15). You pray for God's kingdom to come, don't you? You have prayed that petition zealously, repeatedly, hopefully, expectantly; Thy Kingdom come (Matthew 6:10). The Lord Christ taught you to pray for His Kingdom to come *among us*. Jesus was adamant. "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). King Herod slaughtered all the boys in and around Bethlehem to stave off a King greater than himself (Matthew 2:16-18); Herod was deluded; all he could see was the earthly domain. Herod was ruled by fear and greed. "My kingdom is *not* of this world." Pharaoh commanded all the male Israelite boys to be cast into the Nile (Exodus 1), seemingly to stop the Seed of the Woman (Genesis 3:15), the promised King, from establishing His reign and rule. Satan was the force behind both Herod and Pharaoh but can anything stop the Kingdom of God from coming?

The crowd who hailed Jesus as the Son of David knew that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Were they rejoicing because they had been liberated from the fear of death? What do you

fear? Death, tyrants, meaninglessness, an empty soul, a vapid heart, a lack of truth; what do you fear? Punishment, poverty, sickness, having your sin exposed, your shallowness exposed, your judgmental heart exposed; what do you fear? The crowd who waved their palm branches and shouted “hosanna,” what did they think that they were getting? Did some of them turn on Jesus when He didn’t deliver what they expected? How well acquainted are you with the nature of Christ’s kingdom? What fear still lingers in your heart, your mind?

This morning we have the most marvelous confluence of Christian faith, Christian life, Christian pilgrimage. An aged saint of Christ the King, who died in the faith, has a symbol of the resurrection dedicated to her memory. Simultaneously, three angelic young ladies are grafted into Jesus’ death and resurrection by Holy Baptism. Virginia Alhorn lived her entire life on this earth in the Kingdom of God. She knew great joy and great loss. Virginia hearkened to Christ’s voice in the Gospel. Jesus called her by name and Virginia followed Him. She is now in the Master’s realm of eternal light. The Kingdom of God nurtured her throughout her 90+ years. Forgiveness put fear of punishment to flight. Jesus being exposed on the cross and paying for her sins was the regal covering that she wore in humility. These three girls... what will they be? Picture them being loved throughout their lives by the King of the Universe. Picture them becoming thoroughly acquainted with Christ’s Kingdom as they hear of His triumphant entry, as they hear of His sacrifice on the Holy Cross, as they hear of Easter glory. The Kingdom of God is among us and these three girls are going to profit. Bold, strong, humble, merciful, sacrificial – Christ’s nature animates His Kingdom and these three girls are going to profit mightily.

Our sin, our shortcoming is that we are easily distracted. Wormwood would come to us and take our attention off of the kingdom of Christ and make us obsessed with the kingdoms of the world. Like a cat that can’t take his eyes off the flashlight on the wall, the internet and the cable news and the endless political prognosticating is a distraction that we allow to claim more and more of our focus. If you’re looking for a Christian utopia in this world, I’ve got news for you. If you’re looking for wisdom on the internet or the cable news channels or from the political prognosticators, I’ve got news for you. What does Christ’s Kingdom offer you? Peace; the peace which the world cannot give. Christ’s wounds are peace. Christ’s empty tomb is peace. Christ’s Word of consolation is perfect peace. What does Christ’s Kingdom offer you? Brotherhood, sisterhood; the bond of fellowship is Christ’s gift. He makes us one. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed this: “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me” (John 17:22f.).

What is that glory that He gave us? His body and blood; we are one in the Kingdom of God for Christ is at work among us to give us the fruit of His sacrifice. That is the Kingdom which is going to nurture Marigold, and Jordanna, and Phoebe all their days. Listen to Zephaniah 3 and picture our congregation, see yourself, see Christ’s kingdom: “Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:16-17).

The Lord Christ is delighted by His Kingdom, by this congregation, this body of believers. Hosanna! We sing that in faith, knowing that Christ comes among us with His Kingdom. Save us! He enters in triumph here and every place where He causes His name to be remembered.

We are delivered from sin and death by His mighty hand. Christ on the cross has dismantled everything that you have ever feared. We know how majestic our King is. Crucified, His glory is enlarged. The more He is forced to endure shame, the more majestic He becomes. You see it with the eyes of your heart. You see His Kingdom come as He cries out in pain: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" His Kingdom is here. His Kingdom is eternal. That Kingdom is a consolation in your soul that will never let you go. The Lord Christ reigns from the tree. The Lord Christ reigns in His church. His Kingdom is grace and love and heaven and truth and mercy and eternal life. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.