

Palm Sunday 2016 – St Thomas

Grace to you, and peace from God, the Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Text: Luke 19: 28 – 44

²⁸After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰“Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’” ³²Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: ³⁸“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” ⁴⁰“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

⁴¹As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴²and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

Let us pray: Lord God, our heavenly Father, we thank you for sending us your Son, not as a mighty ruler whom we would have to fear, but as a servant and a man of sorrows, who suffered and died for us! Grant us faith in him that we may attain the salvation, which he has won for us. Come now, Lord, and bless our speaking and our hearing. Amen.

In the Name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, dear friends

Today we are at the start of the Holy Week. As you all know, this week brings the season of Lent for this year, to a head. On Friday we will remember the crucifixion and the burial of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ! As we are now heading for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, the theme of ‘The Triumphal Entry’, which, by the way, is the same as the one we had on the 1st Sunday of Advent, is all about contemplating Christ’s suffering and death, whilst during the Advent Season it was all about Christ’s birth, and him, physically coming into this world as the Saviour.

So, we are now following a different route along this text, to the one we took during the season of Advent. During the season of Lent we being reminded about, what it actually did cost Jesus that we might be saved! We did cause him to suffer and die on the cross, because of our sin! That was no joke, or may be, some kind of a ‘show’! No, that was the harsh reality of God’s punishment, which our Saviour was bearing for what we, and all of mankind had done wrong and still are doing wrong!

Even though Jesus did know that, after having stood through everything in obedience and submission to the Father's will, he was going to be resurrected again. But he still did feel all the pain as intensely as any other living human being would have. And, worst of all, there also was the pain of having been forsaken and rejected by the Father, because of the sin of the world that had been placed on him. So, this is a rather sombre time and yet, we also know that it soon will be followed by the joy of the resurrection, which we will be celebrating on Easter Sunday. But the saying is true, namely, that only those Christians who have truly recognised the fact of the severity of Christ's suffering and death, because of their sin, will also be able to really appreciate the true joy of Easter!

Dear friends, in taking a look at this report about the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, there are a number of points that could be discussed. One of those is the question, why the mood of the crowd swung around so quickly from shouting the "*Hosanna!*" to shouting the "*Crucify Him!*" which they did, barely 5 days later! For this you need to remember that these pilgrims, on arriving at Jerusalem, were normally in good spirit. They had just completed a long and dangerous journey on foot, and so they were glad at having finally arrived! Over the last day or two they also had already gathered into small groups as they met up with other pilgrims at the various junctions, along the way. Then they normally started singing Psalms, praising God for the privilege of being able to come to the Holy City.

Secondly, they had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of the commemoration of the Exodus, by which their forefathers had been set free from slavery in Egypt. This was a joyous time, but still, deep down in their hearts, they were not free! Therefore, many a Jew probably had been begging God to send the promised Messiah, who, according to the popular political opinion of those days, was meant to set them free from Roman oppression. What better time, than for him to do it right now, at the festival of Freedom. And then, they had also heard about this preacher from Galilee, and may-be some had even seen him perform great miracles, so that, among the common people, he was seen as being this Messiah! So when meeting up with this man riding on the donkey's colt, with people quietly saying: That's him, who has recently even raised a man from the dead, who had already been in his grave for four days! It then was quite normal for them, to just join in this march of honour.

But eventually, everything turned out differently from what was expected! There was no confrontation with the Romans! Instead, the confrontation seemed to be with those, who actually were meant to have been his allies, namely the High Priests, the Pharisees and the members of the Sanhedrin! As He went along, He even predicted the destruction of the Holy City! And so, many of those, who were participating at the entry into the city could have started asking questions, doubting whether Jesus really was the Blessed one, who was coming in the name of the Lord! What they didn't realise, was that their actual problem was their sinfulness before God, and not so much the Roman oppressors! And so they didn't realise that Jesus had actually come, to set them free from the sin, which was separating them, and all people, from God!

Disappointment and unfulfilled expectations have all along been dangerous components for the mood and the spirit of the masses. Under those conditions, shouts of joy and jubilation can quickly turn into rejection and resentment. That's the danger with such masses of people, because the individuals no longer take rational decisions independently. They all start acting like everybody else does, and as a result, in no time you can actually have a riot on your hands! That's what happened in Jerusalem on Good Friday!

So now, dear friends, the big question to you and to me is: Where do you, and where do I stand in this whole story? Do we perhaps also only sing praises to Jesus, under cover of the masses, because everybody else does? Are we only praising him, when we fear no come backs from other people? Or, do we remain faithful to him, even though there might be a chance that friendships may be jeopardised? Are we perhaps only involved as long as things are going well and, as long as we think that God and Jesus are fulfilling all our wishes just fine?

It's easy to proclaim Christ when things are going well! But, what happens, when we suddenly are facing difficulties, when we, or one of our loved one's get sick and perhaps have to suffer from a debilitating disease? Or when people dear to us are taken away by death? Then it's not so easy any longer! Then many people are starting to doubt! And then they often tend to do, what those masses in Jerusalem did! They turn their backs on God and on Jesus and start shouting: *"Away with him! Crucify him!"*

It's a well-known fact that people are very easily influenced, especially when they don't know, what it's all about. That's why Jesus has given us His Word in writing! And that's why he said at his ascension: *"Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you!"*

Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus definitely wants those people who belong to him, to be taught to know the foundation of their faith, namely the Bible! All this nonsense that you tend to find these days in Churches and in matters regarding the Christian faith, stems from the fact that Churches, Pastors and Parents have stopped teaching their children the basic Biblical truths! And for many of those who still got confirmed years before, matters were just left right there, with no further growth whatsoever, having happened afterwards! That's the reason why so many people these days have no spiritual foundation anymore! They know nothing about Baptism, let alone Holy Communion, and so for them, anything goes!

That's also the reason why so many people are following the masses, instead of remaining close to the Lord, who has indicated that he will come to us by the ordinary 'means of grace'. By His Word, by the Water of Holy Baptism and in, with and under the Bread and the Wine in Holy Communion, He comes to us! And He does so, without any assistance from the Pastor or the preacher! And, by the power of the Holy Spirit, He brings us the gifts of His grace and mercy! There we receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, by faith alone! That's about as unassuming as his entry into the City of Jerusalem on the back of a donkey's colt. But it is at the same time, as awesome as his death on the cross of Calvary!

May God grant, that we will be here regularly, to greet him, our Saviour and Redeemer, who comes to us in the name of the LORD God Almighty, right where we are, namely in Church. Amen!

We pray: Lord, Jesus Christ, we thank you that we may have and know your Word! Grant, that we may also teach our children accordingly. And help us that we ourselves will never stop studying and learning from it. Lord, bless us, where we are now entering Holy Week! Help us to recognise our guilt and let us confess this to you! Forgive us, o Lord, and accept us back, time and again, as you children, whom you have redeemed! And the peace of God, which is way above all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, for life everlasting. Amen.