

Palm Sunday (2018)

John 12:20–43 *Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.* So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.* Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

In the Name of Jesus.

This happy Palm Sunday (and Confirmation Day for three of the greatest in the kingdom of heaven) your pastor intends to speak to y’all about liberty: that is, y’all’s **LIBERATION FROM...GOING...TO...WORSHIP!**

And the hearts, minds and souls of dear sheep at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church groan—again—‘Here he goes again! We want MORE people coming to church with us; not LESS!!’

You know, I tracked down that English word ‘church.’ It seems that it’s some mangled form of a Greek word—probably by the Scottish, from a word which means, ‘The Lord’s...whatever! The Lord’s thing, the Lord’s gathering, the Lord’s day, the Lord’s people.’ ‘Belonging to the Lord’ in Greek is something like ‘Kuriakos’; Kuriakos—Kirk—Church. That’s the lineage.

Why, the heavy lecture, first thing today? It’s the tools the Holy Spirit has given your poor preacher to break your chains; and the chains of all men!

When I speak of freedom FROM WORSHIP—I mean freedom from EVERYTHING that belongs to the prince of this world—the devil, Satan, the liar and murderer, God’s ape—and freedom FOR everything and anything that is the Lord’s!

There was a feast in Jerusalem—the ONE SPOT God would meet men for certain while the Old Covenant held

sway. But the Lord's spirit was troubled. Why? For there were Greeks—about the WORST type of people you could find regarding morality and decency and knowledge of the Ten Commandments—that is, outside of the United States of America!

And the Greeks were stuck in the hardest place of all: between the tyranny that terrorized the people of the Old Covenant—so many rejoiced at Jesus' appearance, yet had some sort of Stockholm Syndrome regarding the gathering they were brought up in: the synagogue. No matter how much their poor consciences were burdened and beaten, they could not free themselves from THAT WORSHIP—the kind that STILL DEMANDS SOME THING from US: some tears, some cash, some clocked in time, hands holding Bibles, some cash (did I say that one already?).

To free them, the free the Spirit of the Father to ALL MEN, took the frail flesh of the Son of God to be lifted up on the cross of shame. Wrapped up in ONE MAN: Man Who loved God in a way even Moses could not object; receiving the worst punishment Moses could imagine; and even while up there, caring for others: 'behold your mother; behold your son.'

The freedom of OUR Baptism at Christ's authority too—and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God in each one of us. Freedom FROM any worship of God that

smacks of fear, works, Law, superiority—oh, you know it all.

Freedom FOR—how does the Lord say it? ‘And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to myself!’

Your poor pastor thinks he can be tricky—but I’m lousy at it. Trying to speak to a dear person I know—who has swallowed the Holy Spirit, as Luther says, ‘feathers and all!’ And I thought I could proceed by reading, in Hebrew with this dear one, the happy guarantee of a NEW treaty between God and men in Jeremiah 31. A covenant, a deal so NEW, so utterly DIFFERENT from the Law, that a man cannot break it!

But after language and translating and moving the discussion up to the work of Jesus, this dear Christian said to me with a squinting eye, the smirk y’all know well and the tilt of the head: ‘Well, the way YOU are talking, then EVERYONE has been saved and should go to heaven!’

Horror of horrors! Could you imagine what this would mean? If peace between the God we offend all day, and cannot see—peace between Him and us, so much so, that He is at our beck and call at any time, despite our offending of Him all day long—if that peace covers, as Jesus says about His drawing, ALL MEN, then even I

would be REQUIRED to take heart and rejoice and never despair of my standing before God! You too!

Delivering a funeral sermon I did not want to deliver, I hit upon a happy thought. There are two requirements to be a Lutheran pastor. One is to pass kindergarten. Two tries and I made it! So I can read! (And I am blessed to be married to a kindergarten teacher, in case any words are too hard for me!)

The second requirement after being able to read, is to read the Bible, Old Covenant AND New Testament, and not to add to or take away from anything there! Simple enough!

A Lutheran—pastor OR, more importantly, SHEEP, Y'ALL!—finds his faith and worship and witness in the Word alone! We leave to the other, smarter, more sophisticated Christians to read the bare word and tell the Lord what He can and cannot mean!

‘This is my Body.’ (Oh, He can’t mean REALLY!’)

God was in Christ reconciling the WORLD to Himself! (‘Well, it does not mean actually the WHOLE world!’)

Baptism now saves you! ('Well, you can't just take that at face value!')

Whose sins Y'ALL forgive, they are forgiven! ('Only God can forgive sins! Why would God hand that authority over to any man?!')

And so on....

Now, THERE is worship that is Kuriakon, Kirk, Church, belonging to the Lord! 'And I, when I am lifted up, will draw ALL MEN to Myself!'

Not to a regimen—to Himself!

Not to set of laws and requirements—to what is HIS!

Worship of God in Spirit and in the Gospel, in Truth.
NOT worship of God that is filled with fear.

It's funny: when I translate New Testament Greek or Old Covenant Hebrew with LSU students, very often I have

a student filled with excitement; for when they get up and do something on a Sunday morning—just ANYTHING can APE Church!—they are bored to numbness, nothing is taught, nothing is learned, preachers blab on about whatever hits their fancy, without knowing what the bare reading of the Bible is.

And my habit is to tell them that they COULD do something ELSE on Sunday morning! I tell them I know of a place where they could actually hear the Gospel and rejoice with poor sinners that God desires no man to perish, but for all men to come to repentance and be saved! And—almost without FAIL!—the look of terror on their faces, when they realize I am suggesting they walk out of their Sunday morning prison, into freedom.

So John 12 is a great comfort to me. And I hope to y'all. And, it's a good call to repentance for us!

In the Lord's Thing, the Church, no one need offer, deliver, produce any THING from themselves for God! And you and I are freed also, my dear ones, to proclaim forgiveness and freedom and heaven's open ear and the love of God the Father for all men—and NEVER be burdened with the thought: 'Well, are they going to drive to the address I drive to on the Lord's Day?'

This Gospel is so important to me, because today three young confirmands confess with their lips what they trust in their hearts: the faith of the Baptism into Christ, the Apostle's Creed. And the older I get, the more nervous I become about asking them if they are going to continue to attend the Lord's Table and encourage their fellow Christians—'Until death!' 'With the help of God, pastor!'

History has shown me that the majority of those who say such things will become strangers to me within a decade. What do I do?

Forget about me!

What does the LORD do with His OWN?! 'What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?! No! For this hour, for this glory, I have come into the world!'

You see, He is ALWAYS comforting His people, tending His sheep. So that above all else our confidence is the confidence of every man we meet: I am the Lord's!

I'm sorry if I repeat my stories too often. But if they help, they help.

I have a little brother who is a little less self righteous than his brother the pastor. He actually has to work for a living. And on vacation one time, he started to moan to me—ugh! Sounded like me!—about the two or three times a year that CERTAIN people show up at the Lord’s Thing, Church. And, almost a quote, ‘And they come marching in there as if they OWN the place, though next week I won’t see them; or for months on end!’

And because I had watched my dear father deal with these very such people, I said to my brother, ‘I know why those people only make it to Sunday morning church a 2-3 times a year!’ And with a smile, he asks, ‘Why?’ And I told him: ‘Because those poor people know YOU are going to be there the rest of the year! I’m surprised they make it there 2-3 times!’

My brother works with his hands; so he’s not flabby and soft like me, but wiry and muscular. And he got up and walked away; and I heard him coming back; and I’m trying to judge if I jump off the balcony I will break a leg. And instead of retribution, my little brother brought back a cooler—of sody-pop, or something’—and said, ‘OK. You’re talking like Dad! Where am I going wrong?!’

A far better Christian than I have ever been. Ready to be called to repentance at any time. Ready to see Jesus; and His glory!

I'm gonna wrap up. Two requests:

Before any of y'all walk up and greet me on Sunday morning, greet AT LEAST two people you do not know at the Lord's house! And if you know them all, then reintroduce yourself to those you know!

And two: go to the sporting goods store and buy yourselves knee pads. For the next time you walk up to me in the Lord's house, on the Lord's day, with the Lord's sheep where HE is—at His Holy Communion—and you ask me, 'Pastor, who is that over there?!'

It's somewhere in the Greek text, or the Hebrew text: when you see someone you don't know and go ask the pastor who it is instead of greeting them yourselves, the pastor is required to kick you in the knee!

Our young people joining us at Holy Communion today are NOT becoming BETTER Christians, better children of God, or anything like that. They are joining the contest! To see if THEY can be as helpless a sinner as their poor pastor, so that all the world see in THEM, as they should see in all of US:

If THOSE people have confidence before God, then
Jesus truly has raised ALL MEN TO HIMSELF!

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.