

“I thank You, for You have answered me and have become my Deliverer.
The Stone the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone.
The LORD has done this, and we think it is wonderful.
This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in Him.
O LORD, please save. Lord, please give us success.
Blessed is He Who comes in the LORD’s name. We bless You in the LORD’s temple.
The LORD is God, and He gives us light. March in festive procession with branches up to the
horns of the altar.
You are my God, and I thank You; My God, I honor You highly.
Thank the LORD because He is good and merciful forever!” (Psalm 118:21-29 AAT)

When Jesus came into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, he came as the Lord and King who brings salvation. He didn’t ride horses and chariots with earthly pomp and circumstance. Instead, he came on a beast of burden, meek and gentle, ready to bear our burden of sin and guilt. He didn’t have any sword on his side. He had no armor bearers next to him. He only had his lowly disciples whose weapons in this world would be nothing other than the Word of their Master. And this is precisely the point of Jesus coming into Jerusalem in this way. It happened according to his Word. His Word, which does not return empty, is what brought all of this about. “Go into the village ahead of you,” he told two of his disciples, “and right away you’ll find a donkey tied up and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me.” It all happened just as he said. The Word of our Lord Jesus is his shield and his sword. It is his mighty weapon, which he has been wielding his entire earthly ministry up to this point. And everything is happening just as he has spoken.

But our Lord’s words go back even farther than this. Consider what the people do. They spread their clothes and palm branches on the ground where Jesus was riding. This was just as our Lord recorded in Psalm 118 several hundred years before this: “March in the festive procession with branches.” They shouted “Hosanna,” which means “Save now” or “Please save.” Again, this was recorded in this same Psalm, “O LORD, please save! Lord, please give us success!” And they also chanted these words from the Psalm, “Blessed is he who comes in the LORD’s name. We bless you in the LORD’s temple.” Everything was happening according to the Word of the Lord. From the donkey and its colt to the clothes and branches on the ground, even to the words of praise coming out of the lips of the people, it all took place because God said it would.

Psalm 118 is a song of praise. The people of Israel would have sung it during the feasts, especially the Passover. It’s a wonderful song about God’s mercy, which he has promised to keep for his people. It calls on all Israel to sing of God’s eternal mercy. It calls on the priests to sing of this mercy. And it calls on all people who fear God to sing of this mercy. It tells of the great salvation the Lord has won by his right arm, and it tells of the certain hope in the resurrection and eternal life. “I will not die, but I will live and tell what the LORD has done!” Jesus came into Jerusalem just days before the Passover Feast. This Psalm, along with others, would have been ringing in people’s ears. And now these words, written so many years before, were finally being fulfilled.

So on this Palm Sunday, let us consider these last nine verses of Psalm 118.

Just as the Psalm begins by thanking the Lord for his mercy lasting forever, the Psalm wraps up by identifying what this mercy is. “I thank You,” sings the Psalm, “for You have answered me and have become my Deliverer.” In other words, “You have become my Salvation.” God said to Moses, “I am

what I am,” and here the Psalm reveals who he is. He is Salvation. He delivers us from sin and death. He is the Stone, the Chief Cornerstone. But how has he become this? How is he our Deliverer, our Salvation, our Chief Cornerstone? It says, “The Stone the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone.”

The builders of the temple, the leaders of the people who watched over the affairs of the temple of God, would reject this one Stone. As Moses struck the Stone in the wilderness causing water to come out of it, so the Scribes, Priests, and Pharisees would strike Christ, delivering him over to the Romans to be crucified. This Stone, rejected by the builders, would become the Cornerstone. He is the one who holds the entire temple of God together. And here we aren’t singing about a temple made with hands. No, Jesus is the Head of his Church, who is his own Body. It was because he was rejected by the leaders of his own people that he became the Rock on which our Salvation rests forever.

When Jesus was rejected it didn’t look like a glorious sight. As the prophet Isaiah foretold, “He had no form or beauty that we would desire him.” He was despised and rejected by men. And yet, the Psalm says that this is marvelous in our eyes. Why? Because this is the work of the LORD himself. While it looked like the enemies of Christ won the day as Jesus hung on a cross, this was all a part of God’s own plan. This was all what his Word said would happen. In fact, his Word brought it all about. As the Psalm sings, “The LORD had done this, and we think it is wonderful.”

These are words that can only come from faith in God’s promise. To look at an image of Christ hanging on the cross and see it as beautiful – to think it is wonderful – smacks in the face of our human reason. In the same way, what is beautiful about eating Jesus’ body and blood? How can water do such wonderful things? It is because it is what the LORD has done. It is his work. He has spoken it, and he has fulfilled it so that sinners would be saved from hell and given eternal life.

When my wife was growing up her mother would always say the same thing on Sunday mornings while they were getting ready for church. She would say, “This is the Day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Leah told me this one Sunday morning when she saw that I was troubled about something. I don’t remember what was stressing me out. All I know is that it was sin – fears that others have sinned or will sin against me, fears that others will find out about my sins or for some reason get offended by what I say or do, sadness over sickness or death which comes about because of sin, some kind of conflict which can easily be solved but gets magnified because of sin – whatever it was, it all came down to sin. But why do we come to church? We come to receive what the LORD has done. He has done it. It is finished. All sin has been taken away. Death has been defeated. And though we have to suffer crosses and afflictions and temptations and sorrows, no one can take away the Lord’s Day. Let us rejoice and be glad in him!

Again, this statement can only come from faith. It’s so easy for your body and your heart to lose its joy. But faith clings to the Word and work of the LORD. No matter how things are going in your life, no matter how much sin and shame and guilt burden your conscience, faith clings to Jesus, the LORD who saves. Faith cries out Hosanna to the Son and Lord of David, to the God Most High, to the great I AM who has done it all.

In the days when the temple was being rebuilt, when Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, was leading the building project, the prophet Zechariah taught the people what this temple was all about. This temple was to be a sign of God’s promise that he would come to dwell among his people. He himself

would come in his own name to make atonement for their sins with a covenant made with blood. He himself would come as the King. He would come on a donkey, meek and mild, righteous, and having salvation (Zech 9:9 ff.). In the fourth chapter of Zechariah the prophet writes:

And the Word of the LORD came to me saying, “Zerubbabel’s hands laid the foundation of this temple, and his hands will finish it, and so you will know the LORD of armies sent Me to you.” (Zech 4:8)

Who is the one being sent? And who is the one sending? It is the LORD. The LORD is being sent, and the LORD is the one doing the sending. The LORD himself says, “and so you will know the LORD of armies sent Me to you.” Jesus is the LORD, sent by the LORD. He is the eternal Son of God, God in the highest, sent by his eternal Father. So the people sing the praises of the Psalm, “Blessed is He Who comes in the LORD’s name. We bless You in the LORD’s temple.”

The Word of the LORD endures forever. His mercy endures forever. So Jesus endures, with great patience, the sins of all people. He is the only true God who comes to us in the darkness of our guilt and shame to give us his light. So just as we saw the children do this morning, just as the people did on that first Palm Sunday, just as the Word of God said in the Psalm nearly three thousand years ago, “March in festive procession with branches up to the horns of the altar.”

Today we hear our sister Rebekah confess her faith in Jesus. She will join us in the procession to the horns of this altar as she clings to her Savior’s promise, eating his body and drinking his blood, which was sacrificed once on the altar of the cross and continually given to her and all of us here at this altar. She confesses with us the same Savior, because she has been given faith by the same Word of God who has fulfilled all things for our redemption. What a wonderful day! It’s the Lord’s doing. It’s wonderful in our eyes, and we will rejoice and be glad in him who purchased us for himself.

It is because of God’s Word and promise, fulfilled in Christ, that God’s saints can march in festive procession with branches up to the horns of the altar. The people of Israel sang this as they brought their lambs to be sacrificed for the Passover. Jesus came as the true Passover Lamb, going uncomplaining forth, the guilt of sinners bearing, laden with the sins of earth, none else the burden sharing. So we sing to him, “You are my God, and I thank You; my God, I honor You highly. Give thanks to the LORD! For he is good, and his mercy endures forever!” Amen.