

## **“Your King Comes to You,” Matthew 21:1-11, Palm Sunday, March 29, 2015**

*“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout aloud O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation! He is humble and mounted on a donkey on a colt, the foal of donkey” (Zechariah 9:9)*

Brothers and sisters, let’s face it! There are many people in the world today who find little to cheer about. Perhaps they get excited enough to cheer when the **Lady Gamecocks** score another victory over UNC as they did this past Friday night and scheduled to play FSU today in Tampa. But such personal expressions of cheering and enthusiasm are short-lived.

In the Old Testament lesson today, the Prophet Zechariah is speaking to the people of Israel, now recently returned to Jerusalem, having spent the vast majority of their lives **as** political exiles in Babylon. I imagine that there was considerable cheering that took place on their part initially too, as they were now entering into what would hopefully become for them also their Promised Land, just as it had been for their ancestors, centuries before this!

You know, as I studied the historical setting behind the prophecy of Zechariah, I could not help but think about all of the cheering, hoopla and excitement that took place right here in our own nation, 34 years ago in January 1981, when the 52 American diplomats and citizens who had been taken hostages against their will in Iran and held there for 444 days (**Nov. 4, 1979-Jan. 20, 1981**) under the rule of the Ayatollah Khomeini **were finally allowed to return home!**

Yes, part of Zechariah’s book speaks to a time when the Jewish people had returned from exile to a devastated land. Quite naturally, they were very busy getting their hands on whatever building materials they could find to rebuild their homes and to restore their farms and vineyards. It was a time of small beginnings. People needed reassurance that God would bless them. And yet this **great hope that they had for a better tomorrow was** not something that they could have in any way conjured up for themselves, **but came to them only as part of a great MESSIANIC VISION that the Holy Spirit of God was empowering the Prophet Zechariah to share with the people of his nation.**

And that **vision** in our **Old Testament lesson** is something that **St. Matthew, in our Palm Sunday Gospel sees as being** ultimately fulfilled **for God’s people** some 520 years later **with the events that took place in city streets of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday.** And yet here we are also again today, brothers and sisters, **celebrating this ongoing reality, for you, for me, for every one of us.** I can look at every one of you today and say: **“YOUR KING COMES TO YOU!”** I believe that **“your”** king is still coming to you, if you are willing to receive him as your king and **if you are willing to surrender your whole life in cheerful obedience to him.**

It wasn’t always good news in that ancient world for a people to hear that their king was coming to them, for some of them were mean and vicious kings who were not really interested in the welfare of their subjects at all. As a matter of fact, the first 8 verses of Zechariah 9, from which our Old Testament lesson is taken today involves Zechariah’s prophecy about another “king” who would one day be coming to all the surrounding nations of Israel not to benefit them but to exploit them. Bible scholars have shared their beliefs that **this prophecy was** fulfilled 120 years after it was spoken around the year 388 BC with the coming of **Alexander the Great, of Greek origin, from Macedon, who was very ruthless as a conquering and marauding king.**

When Alexander and his armies arrived on the scene he struck great terror into the hearts of those people who were occupying the territories he wanted to conquer and make his own. So often, history attests, he would slaughter all the men in a city and then sell all of the women and children into slavery. His kingship was very different in nature than the coming of King Jesus. King Alexander rode on a white steed, indicating that he was coming to declare war on others, **but** King Jesus comes in a great spirit of humility, riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey—**indicating that he was coming to establish a** peace treaty between his Heavenly Father and all people; God’s people **whom Jesus, by his perfect life death and resurrection,** would ransom from sin, death and the devil **and bring them safely into the vast realm of God’s very own kingdom!**

Please note the personal nature of Zechariah’s proclamation: The personal pronoun “YOUR” is very important here! When the Gospel of Jesus Christ is fully embraced into the hearts and minds of people—that Gospel becomes—not just someone else’s Gospel or someone else’s good news, but **“my”** Gospel and **“my”** good news! Certainly St. Paul

captures this thought for us in many of his New Testament letters! To a young pastor named Timothy Paul writes: *“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in **MY GOSPEL**, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!”* (2 Timothy 2:8-9)

In his closing words to the church at Rome Paul (Romans 16:25-27) writes: *“**Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my Gospel and preaching of Jesus Christ, ..., according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen**”*

One of the questions that we usually ask catechumens who are about to be confirmed is: “Why do we say in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, “I believe,” rather than “we believe.” The answer is because no person can ever be saved by someone else’s faith. Everyone must believe the Gospel for themselves! That’s why spiritually speaking, someone once commented that God has many children, but no grandchildren!

Jesus says: *“My sheep hear my voice and they know me and they follow me and I give unto them eternal life”* (John 10)! Jesus is emphasizing the personal nature of the relationship he comes to establish between us and him, and through him, with our Heavenly Father.

Martin Luther, in his explanation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> article of the Apostle Creed, teaches us to personalize the Gospel for ourselves also in every way! Who is Jesus Christ: **“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God begotten of the Father and true Man born of the Virgin Mary is MY LORD, who has redeemed ME, a lost and condemned creature, who has purchased and won ME from sins, death and the power of the devil, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with his holy, precious blood and his innocent sufferings and death, all that I might be HIS own and serve HIM in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as he is risen from the death and lives and reigns to all eternity.**

The hymn writer says: **“The King of love my Shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never! I nothing lack, if I am his and he is mine forever!”**

Your “King”—your Commander in Chief, the One to whom if you really do belong to him, you gladly acknowledge him and his love to the Sovereign Ruler over your whole life. When you sing that lovely hymn, **“Beautiful Savior, King of creation, Son of God and Son of Man,”** you really mean it when you sing out loud to him: **“Truly, I’d love you! Truly I’d serve you—Light of my soul, my Joy, my Crown!”**

The Prophet Zechariah, you see was trying to engender some enthusiasm among God’s people, so that they would go at their tasks with a renewed and determined spirit and so that they would also now be empower by God to face the future with hope.

**“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!”** (Vv. 9-10)

Who is this king, who still comes to us today through the holy Word of God, and through his blessed sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion?

**(1) Zechariah identifies him first and foremost as the King who is “righteous;” which means that King Jesus never comes to exploit us who are his subjects at all!**

Jesus was not corrupt the way that so many other kings in that ancient world were corrupt, and the way that so many world rulers in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were corrupt, men like Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin and Mussolini and Saddam Hussein.

When I was preparing for this message I came across an article entitled the Ten Most Corrupt leaders in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, featuring such memorable figures of the world stage in history as President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines from 1972-1986, who absconded with some \$10 billion dollars that he stole from the Pilipino people. And there's President Jean-Claude Duvalier, who was the president of Haiti from 1971-1986, who absconded with some \$800 million from the Haitian people.

When it comes to the world of finance, of course, Bernie Madoff was considered the king of Wall Street, but who really was a crook and who actually made off with some \$65 billion dollars from personal investors in his Ponzi scheme, but who was later convicted in 2009 of 11 federal felonies and is now serving out a 150 year sentence in prison.

**But King Jesus was himself without sin who came into this world to make full atonement for our sins by offering his perfect life as the ultimate sacrifice in becoming the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).**

***“God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, so that through him we might become the righteousness of God!” (2 Cor. 5:21)***

What other man ever dared to stand before his adversaries and ask the question that Jesus was bold enough to ask, when he said one day according to John 8:46, *“Which one of you convicts me of sin?”* because alone knew himself to be genuinely free from all sin.

*“Rejoice O daughter of Zion and shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! For your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation!”*

Who is this king who still comes to us today through God's Means of Grace; through God's Holy Word and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion?

**(2) He is the one who comes to us, not only “righteous” but also having salvation!**

If you, by the grace of God, have come to place your trust in him as your Savior, then you can also rejoice at the thought of him coming to become your judge, because you know he bore all of your sins in his body unto death on a tree (I Peter 2:24), just as I know that he has borne all of my sins for me in his body on that same tree of the cross of Calvary! We should be so confident of this our King tells us, so that when the last day comes, Jesus tells us then to: *“Lift up your heads and rejoice, for your salvation is drawing near” (Luke 21:28)!*

**(3) And our proper response to Jesus again today as people of faith should be to rejoice and shout in triumph.** The double commands of the prophet to rejoice greatly and to shout in triumph, emphasizes exuberant joy! The commands are addressed to the daughters of Zion and Jerusalem, which means, those who are certain they are living out their lives in this world in a covenantal relationship with God (Romans 2:28-29; 9:8).

Perhaps you wonder, “How can I rejoice greatly when there are so many overwhelming problems in the world and in my personal life? Jesus' coming will be nice, but that seems like a long ways off. How can I rejoice *now*?

The answer is the same for us today as it was for Israel then: We rejoice by faith in our coming King. It would still be four long centuries from the time of Zechariah's prophecy in our Old Testament lesson today before Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah and Promised Savior of the world would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, and even then, most of Israel still missed it! The bottom line is that we either believe the Word of God or we do not! When Jesus came the first time, he not only fulfilled this prophecy, but hundreds of other Old Testament prophecies too!

Jesus came the first time bringing salvation, and Jesus is still here today again, in this very moment, offering to us God's salvation, but he will come a second time as the judge of all the earth. **Let me say it again: If you are trusting in him as your personal Savior, then you can rejoice also at the thought of his coming to be your judge, because the Bible**

**tells us he has taken our sins away from us** *“as far as the east is from the west!”* You may remember how beautifully the Prophet Isaiah words all of this for us in the first chapter of Isaiah, verse 18: *“Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool!”*

I want to close by sharing with you a true story about a man named Tim Miller, his wife and three children who were living in Virginia a few years back. With the three children being out of school on spring break during Holy Week, they decided to take a trip to Orlando, Florida. On the first day they went to Universal Studios, on the next two days they went to Disney World, and on the fourth day they had planned to go to Sea World. But unfortunately at the end of the third day the nine year old daughter Jennifer grew sick. She had a fever and then chills. Dad took her to an emergency room hospital in Orlando while mom stayed back at the motel with the other two children. After a series of medical tests, including CT Scans, X-Rays and blood work there was still no confirmed diagnosis. Jennifer spent the night in the hospital. The next morning the physician came in and said that they needed to perform a lumbar puncture, which in colloquial language means a “Spinal Tap.”

Sometimes these tests are given with a local anesthesia and at other times no anesthesia is given. There was no anesthesia in this case. The little girl also had to be stripped of her clothing and lay on the medical table. She was asked to curl up in a fetal position. And as the searing pain of the fluid was entering her spinal column she called out: “Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!” fearful of what was taking place and wanting her father to intervene and save her from that whole ordeal.

The father, Tim Miller, later said that though the analogy is only minuscule by comparison that he couldn’t help but think how tough it must have been for God the Father to witness his Son’s horrible crucifixion on a cross! But just as Mr. Miller was willing to witness his daughter go through this because he loved her, the same is true with the Father and the Son. The Father so loved the world that he gave the Son, and the Son so loved the Father and every one of us that he gave his perfect life into death on the cross to save us from our sins.

About 12 years ago a holocaust survivor by the name of Elie Wiesel spoke at the University of SC. He made two statements that night that troubled many of the Christians who were there. He said that Jesus in no way suffered to the degree that those holocaust victims of Nazi Germany suffered under the oppressive rule of Adolf Hitler. But here he was thinking only in there of the act of the physical crucifixion itself. He did not believe that when Jesus hung those six long hours on the cross, that it wasn’t just the physical pain that made that ordeal so overwhelming, but also the fact that it was there that Jesus was bearing in his body the punishment and weight of all the sins of all the people who had ever lived in anytime and place to reconcile us to his Heavenly Father.

Secondly Mr. Wiesel said he could never become a Christian because he could never imagine any father allowing his son to endure an ordeal like that if he had the power to prevent it!

Brothers and sisters, as always, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is powerfully offensive to those who first hear it. We don’t want to believe that our sins are that devastating, nor can we believe that God could ever love the people of this fallen world that much! But our sins are that devastating and our God does love us that much!

There is no other story in all the history of the world that has changed as many lives of people everywhere as has the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When the message is proclaimed God the Holy Spirit is at work to call those who hear it to a spirit of true repentance. We are called to participate in a very important time of self-introspection.

As I consider all the broken and fractured relationships that I have experienced as a sinner in this world, was there something that I could have done differently that I left undone, or was there something I did that it would have been far better for me not to have done! Was there something I said that would have been better to have not said, or something I should have said that I didn’t have the courage to say!

As we acknowledge our sins before our Heavenly Father, the forgiveness that the Son won for us, the one who was “put to death for our transgressions and raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25) become my own personal possession—bringing along with it to me—the sure hope of eternal life!

Will you receive that message in faith again today, with the faith that God is offering right now to bring to you? Or will you reject this notion all together—that YOUR KING COMES TO YOU!?!

I stand before you as one who is wholeheartedly willing to receive it! Will you receive it or will you reject it?

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Jerusalem! Your King comes to you righteous and having salvation! Humble is he, seated upon a donkey, the foal of a donkey!” Amen

**Unfortunately, many people still today may miss seeing Jesus as their Savior too! Why?**