

John 12:27-33

Palm Sunday / Passion Sunday

Lessons for the Day: Zechariah 9:9-12; Philippians 2:5-11; John 12:20-43

The Road Before Him

March 28, 2021

“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.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

What would you do if you knew that this was your last week on earth? I’m sure that most of us would be in shock at this thought, but we may try to do several things. Perhaps we would spend as much time as we could with those closest to us. Perhaps we would try to make amends for past wrongs. Maybe we would have a ‘bucket list’, and would see if there was some way to do those things we always wanted to do before we die. All of this, of course, may depend on why we were dying. If we were incapacitated in a hospital bed, we would simply have to watch the hours pass by. If we were able to communicate, I’m sure we would want to share with family and friends. I’m also sure that we would be praying for a miracle and may even try bargaining with God, looking for just a bit more time.

Sooner or later we all will have to face the fact that our lives are winding down, that the end is near. Since we have no foreknowledge of the future, the only way we could know that the end of our life was near would be due to illness or severe injury. Yet even then we don’t know exactly when the end will come. We could be suffering from a catastrophic illness and experience a miraculous recovery, even when it seems that hope is gone. The only thing we know for sure is that sooner or later, the end will come. We may be with a dying parent or spouse or friend, knowing that the doctors have done all they can do; knowing there is nothing that we can do to delay or fend off the inevitable reality of death. Then—and typically only then—we do come to a point where we reluctantly accept what we cannot change.

Would you do things differently if you could see the future? What if you knew that if you went to work tomorrow, you would be involved in an industrial accident? What if you knew that the plane on which you were flying for your vacation was going to crash? I’m not talking about the statistical odds of something happening; image that you could know beyond a shadow of a doubt that these events were going occur. Then what would you do? I don’t think most of us would be trying to figure out what we could do on our last day on earth, rather we would be looking for any way of avoiding the fate before us. We wouldn’t get on that airplane. We wouldn’t go to work—maybe we would never go to work again. We might even decide to live our lives in a bubble, or wrapped in a big, black rubber suit with lots and lots of padding, surrounded by a roll-cage, with its own built-in fire suppression system.

On this Palm Sunday, we remember our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He comes to Jerusalem so that He may offer His holy, sinless life as the ransom price for the sins of the whole world. He comes to take upon Himself our punishment; suffering and dying the death that we deserve to die because of our disobedience and indifference to God’s holy, righteous law. He comes, knowing what lies before Him. Yet He journeys to the city deliberately and willingly. He sees the road before Him, with its sorrow, its suffering and the inevitability of His death and He travels that road for us, to deliver us and save us.

Christian speaker Malcolm Muggeridge said: *From his Bethlehem birth to his death in Jerusalem, Jesus took the road the prophets had marked out, knowing that it would end on Golgotha. If at times he groaned over its ardours, and right at the end asked whether, after all, he might be let off the final sacrifice and left a little longer in a world he must have loved, or he could not have described and explained it so exquisitely, he always returned to his ultimate prayer: Not what I will, but what thou wilt. This was the theme of his life, the essence of the drama he lived out in order to guide all who came after him in the ways of truth; to give us hope in our despair, and light in our darkness, enabling us to look out from time, our prison, on to the mercy of eternity, our liberty.*

Jesus always knew what the road before Him would bring. The events of Holy Week do not come as a surprise to the Saviour,

who is true man, but is also true God, the God who is all knowing. When we listen to the things He tells the disciples, it is clear that He knows what is coming. He tells them: **“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”** (Mark 10:33–34, ESV) He knows that it is the leaders of the Jews who will condemn Him to death. He knows that they are powerless to carry out the death sentence, and that they will hand Him over to the Gentiles, in this case the Romans; and that is the Roman guards who will mock Him, spit on Him, flog Him and crucify Him. He knows the mocking cries that He will hear from His own people as He is on the cross; those ironic taunts of the chief priests and the scribes: **“He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.”** (Mark 15:31–32, ESV) Yes, He knows all of this and yet He walks that road before Him.

The first time that Jesus spoke of the road before Him, Peter tried to talk Him out of taking this path: this: **“Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”** (Matthew 16:22, ESV) But Jesus rebukes Peter, saying: **“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”** (Matthew 16:23, ESV) Nothing will keep Jesus from making this journey. Nothing will deter Jesus from walking that road that leads to the cross.

Today we remember Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As He journeys down the road into the city, the crowds are shouting: **“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”** (John 12:13, ESV) Perhaps the disciples, in that moment, forgot what Jesus said about being arrested, flogged, mocked and killed. Maybe the Lord was wrong this time. If Jesus has this popularity with the crowds, then the new age of David may be just around the corner.

But Jesus knows that even with those shouts of Hosanna, the cross still lies before Him. The people hail Him as King, but this King comes to serve His people by fulfilling God’s plan for our salvation. The word *hosanna* means ‘save us, we pray’. If Jesus is to answer that prayer of the people along the road to Jerusalem—in fact, if He is to answer the prayers of all people in their needs, then He must travel that road before Him. He must go to the cross and give His life in our place. He cannot avoid all that the coming days will bring. He knows the weight of our sin; He knows the suffering He must bear. But He will do what needs to be done because of His great love for us—that love that is far greater than our sins. He will travel that road to the cross, so that we may have the forgiveness that only He can bring. He will die—and rise—so that we may live with Him forever.

And so we hear Christ say in our text: **“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.”** In response, the Father thunders from heaven to declare: **“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”** The Father is glorified in His Son, the Son who comes into our world of sin and death in order to deliver us from sin and death. Christ is glorified in the strangest of ways—not so much by the palms and cheers of the crowds on Palm Sunday, but through His death on the cross. The Triune God is glorified through the work of our salvation, for all that Christ endures for us reveals to us how different the true God is from the gods that so many worship in this world. He is not a god of self-serving attitudes. He is not a god of vengeance and hatred. He is not a god who is indifferent to the needs of His creation. No, He is the God who loves and cares for all He has made. He is the God **“who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** (1 Timothy 2:4, ESV) He is the God who sees our sin and still wants to bring us back to Himself. He is the God who sees our helplessness and lostness, and who comes to help, save and deliver us. He is the God, who through His Son will bring the victory over sin, death and the devil—all those evil enemies of our lives that seek to keep us from His love and life. That victory lies on the road before Him that leads to the cross. Yet, praise be to God, that road also leads to the empty tomb and the glory of our dear Saviour’s resurrection from the dead.

What would you do if you knew what was going to happen to you, whether good or bad in the coming days? One of the blessings that we have is that we don’t know the things that are going to happen to us day by day. If we did, imagine how stressed we would be as we struggle with the coming realities of our lives! If we have to go to the dentist, knowing that we need a root canal or some major procedure, we wonder what it will be like and how much we will suffer. If we are facing some major surgery or chemotherapy treatments, we struggle with the very thought of what lies ahead.

But there is one thing we can be sure of, and that is that the Saviour who knew what lay before Him, and who willingly gave His life for us rose from the dead to always be with us on our journey. Even if we don’t know what each day will bring, our God does know what lies before us. He works all things for our good. We can face each day with the faith of the psalmist, who said: **“But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hand!”** (Psalm 31:14–15, ESV) Jesus also reminds us: **“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”** (Matthew 6:34, ESV) Our Saviour and our God knows the road that lies before us. He has travelled the hard

road for us. He will also walk with us each step of the way. For Him, there will be no surprises and through Him, the journey will end in safety and peace. Amen.