

✧ Jesu juva ✧

THE POINT OF IT ALL

Jeremiah 23:5-8, Romans 13:8-14, Matthew 21:1-9

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

This is the first day of the new Church Year today; and we start, not with the birth of Christ, but with the death of Christ. Today we see Jesus ascending to Jerusalem with a procession of His followers who cry out “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Hosanna in the highest!” This is, of course, the Palm Sunday procession, a procession that leads not to the throne of David in a Judean palace, but to an enthronement upon the cross on the outside of the royal city where our Lord lays down His life in order to save us; in order to answer those cries of Hosanna which means, “save now” shouted by the crowd, in order to answer the cries of mercy that have rang out through all the ages, in order to answer the single call for mercy uttered by the Heavenly Father, who loves such that He sends His only Son to obtain it once for all mankind.

As the rest of the world is already in full swing getting ready for Christmas, it always seems strange to hear this Palm Sunday Gospel at this time of year. And yet, if were not for Christ’s going up to Jerusalem to die, His coming at Bethlehem would not really matter. Oh, it might be an interesting thing, to be sure; a bit of historical trivia perhaps to be included on board games and talked about in history class: Ah, yes, and when did God come down and become a man for a little while? Oh, professor, that would be in about 3 or 4 b.c. in the town of Bethlehem in Judea. And what was the importance of this event? Um, I’m not sure... Ah, well neither am I really, the professor would respond, though we have several theories that have been put forward which you would do well to study. If Jesus didn’t come down from heaven in order to die, His coming doesn’t help us at all. If anything it would have made our situation that much worse. The holy God comes down to live among His very unholy people, but not to save them. Then what’s left? To gather evidence to judge them, I suppose.



And for the last three weeks we've heard of Christ's judgment, and how that day is a great day of salvation for Christians. But what kind of a day is it if Christ had not gone up to Jerusalem to die? It would then be a day in which all hope was snuffed out; a day of terror and of dreadful doom in which all would be cast into Hell to suffer eternally. Christ would appear and sit upon His righteous throne, but there would be found none who shared in His righteousness, for all whose sins have not been atoned for stand condemned before Him.

Let's take this a step further. What of our way of life? If Christ had not gone up to Jerusalem and to the cross, would your way of life matter? Would it matter whether or not you tried to keep the commandments of God? Would it matter if you tried to love your neighbor as yourself, as St. Paul instructs us to do today? Would it matter whether or not you cast off the works of darkness? I mean, if Christ had not died to forgive you, why bother putting off lewdness and lust, strife and envy? Why not gratify the flesh at every opportunity if Christ had not answered those prayers of Hosanna? If you were to stand judged already on account of your sins, what difference how many or how great they are? If you are going to Hell no matter what, how much does matter how deep into it you are sent?

And what of God Himself? Would God matter to us? Of course, God always matters. He is the creator of all things, and upholds all things by His will and Word; but if He didn't love us enough to send Christ to die for us and save us, would He matter to us at all? Perhaps a little bit, but only as a cause of terror or as an object of hatred. He could not be approached by you, for He dwells in light inaccessible. He could not be worshipped by you, for your worship of Him would be rejected. He could not be served by you, for how can you serve one who demands absolute perfection, and what could you do for Him or give to Him? And you certainly couldn't love Him or have faith in Him. The only faith you could have is the trust that one day He would condemn you and send you into punishment. And so I imagine we would all do our best to ignore God. His will, His very being, would not matter much to us if Christ had not gone up to Jerusalem.

Life would then be at best a materialistic struggle, a nihilistic collection of moments that also would not matter at all in the end. Everything would be robbed of any real meaning beyond the immediate pleasure or pain it brought. And it would all soon be over and quickly forgotten by those who lived. Let's face it; without Christ's death and resurrection, we are creatures to be pitied, creatures without hope, creatures without significance, creatures without worth.

It is this going up to Jerusalem to die; this great work and sacrifice of the Son of God, that gives us hope, that gives creation itself and everything in it and every event that occurs significance, it is the thing which imparts value and meaning to our lives. It gives meaning to the fact that Christ did come into our flesh to become one of us. It makes Christ's coming to judge a thing to be hoped for. And it makes God matter.

The sad thing is, that so many live as if Christ had never come down to earth, never gone up to Jerusalem, never took up His cross, never died, and never rose again. And I ask, what significance can a life lived in unbelief really have? You have to either live only for self and for the little bit of gratification you can get in this life, or you have to concoct some other religion to make sense of things. And so this is what people do, even many who know of Christ and of these Holy Week events upon which all of creation and history are centered.

But you are not to be like them. You have heard the truth. You know that Christ has come, that He has died, and that He has risen. You have believed what Scripture says and what has been proclaimed to you. And you know that Christ has gained mercy, and hope, and life and salvation for you. For through His death He has won forgiveness of all of your sins. And through His resurrection He has overcome the doom and dread of death. He is indeed now rightly called "The Lord Our Righteousness", for though we are sinners He has on account of His death and resurrection declared and made us righteous before the Father.

And now, indeed, it all matters; it all has meaning: God Himself, His will and Word; Christ's coming and work, the Scriptures, the Sacraments that bring you forgiveness and salvation, your baptism and the baptism of this little child today, Elijah. And your life matters too: Christ our Lord loves you so much that He suffered for you, and died for you. And now because He loves you, you are also to love one another, and to put off every thought, word and action that does not flow from love, for such things are of the darkness and are characterized by Paul as the lusts of the flesh; and you are to put on Christ; knowing that He is coming again and that our salvation is nearer than when we first believed, indeed nearer every moment. The day is at hand, and our hope will be fulfilled.

For the cries of Hosanna have been answered by Christ our Lord. This is the point of it all! He has come from the highest and has saved us. Blessed indeed is He who came, He who went to the cross, He who died and who rose again, He who comes to us now with His grace, and He who is coming again in the name of the Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and to whom belongs all glory. Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠

