

Palmarum, the Sixth Sunday in Lent  
March 28, 2010

Rev. David A. Kind  
University Lutheran Chapel  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

✧ Jesu juva ✧

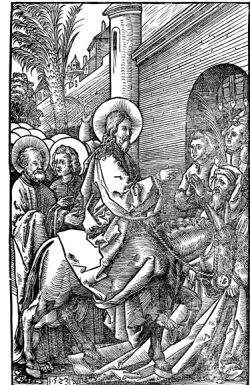
### ENTERING TO ANSWER

Zechariah 9:9-10; Philippians 2:5-11; John 12:12-19; Matthew 26:1-27:66

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

**I**t must have been quite an event. The great rabbi riding into the city of Jerusalem to keep the Passover, surrounded by a throng of His followers. They laid their cloaks and palm fronds at the feet of His donkey, to form what we might call a red carpet reception. And they were crying out that this Jesus was coming in the Name of the Lord, as the King of Israel.

What the people of Jerusalem witnessed that first Palm Sunday was much more than an event, much more than a celebration. They formed this triumphal procession, St. John tells us, because they had either seen for themselves, or heard about, Lazarus having been raised from the dead. And now, they were witnessing another great sign, though the disciples didn't realize it at the time. This sign of the King of Israel riding into Jerusalem in humility had been spoken of before. Zechariah the prophet proclaimed it, as we heard a few minutes ago: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; he is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."



And though they did not understand these things at the time, He who was rightly called their King, was entering to procure for them salvation. He who alone is rightly called "just" was entering the city in order to rescue the unjust by taking all of their injustices and crimes upon Himself. This entry which evoked such joy in the people was entry for Jesus into His Passion. He was entering now in triumphal fashion as a prelude to the triumph He would soon gain for His people. But that triumph would come at a cost, the cost of His own suffering, of His own blood, of His own life. And this He would shortly give up of His own accord in order to gain the victory and free His people from their sin. He would do this to conquer their old enemy, that liar, that snake, who both tempts and then accuses and condemns. He would do it to shatter the doors of their tombs and to save them from Hell's furnace. All of this was foretold by Zechariah when he said: "the battle bow will be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations... because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to the strong-

hold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you." This is what the sign of the King riding into Jerusalem really meant. He was entering to answer all of their prayers for salvation.

You realize, of course, that this is what they were indicating when they cried out to Him the word: "Hosanna!" and cut palm branches and laid them before Him. Again, they appear not to have known the significance of their words at the time.

The word Hosanna, which is a prayer for salvation, translated "deliver us" or "save now", was already in use as a liturgical word that every Hebrew knew from its use at the festival of Booths. For this festival, according to the book of Leviticus and, later, the book of Nehemiah, the people were to go out into the countryside and gather tree branches with which to rejoice before the Lord and to build temporary booths in which to dwell. Leviticus says: "And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days."

Now, according to the rabbis, they not only built booths with these branches, but placed them around the altar in the temple. Once this was done they made a sort of procession around the altar chanting Hosanna hymns, including Psalm 118. What was done in the temple itself also came to be mimicked by the people who carried these branches in their own procession while praying the same Hosanna psalms. On the seventh day they took the branches and beat them on the ground, an act which has been interpreted both to symbolize rain and to symbolize the removal of sin.

This was not, of course, the Festival of Booths, but what the people did mirrors what they had come to know from that festival. And Jesus was entering the city to answer their prayer of Hosanna and to remove their sins, and not only theirs, but those of every faithful man and woman who had come before them praying for salvation.

The Hosanna Psalm, Psalm 118 sums these prayers up for us: "Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, and He has given us light..." Sounds pretty similar to what the people shouted that Palm Sunday; but then there is a strange shift in the Psalm: "Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You." And that was how Jesus would answer the prayers of all those who had hoped in the promise of His coming. He who would be bound to the horns of the altar, the altar of the cross. And though His own people had rejected Him, a Gentile would see the truth proclaimed in the Psalm: "Truly this was the Son of God."

Jesus was the answer for their prayers of Hosanna. And He is the answer for our prayers too. That is why we still cry out hosanna in the liturgy as we prepare to receive the Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood. Here we cry for mercy, for

Christ to enter into our little Jerusalem here and save us. Here we cry for life, for in our flesh we see death at work against us. Here we cry for strength; for in our hearts we find too much weakness. And our Lord answers. He comes to us, triumphant now, risen from the dead, having accomplished our salvation long ago and having put down all of our enemies. He comes just and having salvation to bestow upon us, bringing us the fruits of His sacrifice, the fruits of the cross, His own flesh and His own blood, given and shed for our salvation, for our life, for our strength. Therefore let us rejoice with all the faithful and receive Him with faith and with joyful reverence. Yes, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!" for Christ, the Savior, the Son of God, has entered and has answered your prayers. Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠