

Palm Sunday — A Day Of Joy And Blessing.

Text: John 12:1-19

1) Our Saviour's Death

Suggested Hymns:

2) Our Saviour's Triumph Over Death

733, 86, 299, 283, 603

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 12:1-19, ¹ *Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.* ² *There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.*

³ *Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.* ⁴ *But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said,* ⁵ *"Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"* ⁶ *This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.*

⁷ *But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.* ⁸ *For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."*

⁹ *Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead.* ¹⁰ *But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also,* ¹¹ *because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.*

¹² *The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,* ¹³ *took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!"*

¹⁴ *Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written:* ¹⁵ *"Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey's colt."* ¹⁶ *His disciples did not understand these things at first; but*

when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

¹⁷ Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. ¹⁸ For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. ¹⁹ The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!” (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Palm Sunday is a day of joy and blessing. Some of us may have been confirmed on Palm Sunday. Irrespective of when we were confirmed, year after year we recall with joy how we knelt at the Lord's altar and pledged a lifetime allegiance to our Saviour. Although many years have passed, the words of blessing spoken over us then cause our hearts to burn within us to this day.

Let us always remember this day as a day of joy and blessing. As long as you live, remember with joy the vow you spoke to Jesus in the presence of your parents, your sponsors, and your friends. As long as you live, permit your Saviour's blessing: *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life,”¹* to be a rod and a staff to you.

Today let us more fully understand the real blessing of Palm Sunday, let us learn the lesson which the word of God before us contains for our instruction, namely, that *Palm Sunday Is a Day of Joy and Blessing*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Palm Sunday Is A Day Of Joy And Blessing Provided We Remember In Faith Our Saviour's Death

It was on the evening before the very first Palm Sunday that the Lord Jesus on His way to Jerusalem entered a home He loved in the little village of Bethany. We read: *¹ Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. ² There*

they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.

These words remind us of that festive meal which was served on our Confirmation Day. The custom of honouring a newly confirmed member of the family through a festive meal to which sponsors and friends are invited is a good custom. It helps emphasise the joy and blessedness of the day.

However, let us make sure that the Lord Jesus is present as He was present at Bethany. And He will be present if we invite Him to come. He loves to enter our homes. He delights in blessing every meal we eat with His gracious presence.

As Jesus sat at the supper table, something unusual happened. ***Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.***

It is not difficult to understand that such an unusual act would elicit some comment from those present. We listen first to the comment of one of the Lord's disciples. ***One of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, ⁵ "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"***

Upon first thought these words of Judas make sense. Think of all the good that could have been done with the price of this ointment! It was worth about a year's wages. However, as we read on, it becomes evident that the motive behind these words was far from noble. We read: ***⁶ This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.***

Now let us listen to the comment of the Lord Jesus. Surely, if anyone is able to evaluate the act of Mary correctly, it is the Lord. ***⁷ But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. ⁸ For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."*** This saying of Jesus brings us to the very heart of the first reason why Palm Sunday is a day of blessing.

The act of Mary was a noble act because it was performed in faith, out of love, and in view of the Saviour's impending death. Similarly, everything that happens on Palm Sunday, everything that happened the evening before the first

Palm Sunday in Bethany, and everything that happens this Palm Sunday here in our house of worship, has meaning only when viewed by faith and in the light of our Saviour's death.

Jesus came into the world to save sinners. To accomplish this He had to pay in our stead the dread wages of sin. And since the wages of sin is death,² it was necessary for Jesus to die. This Jesus knew full well.

Throughout His entire life He never lost sight of this truth. Therefore, when His appointed time came, Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem. Even though Jesus knew what awaited Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the palace of Caiaphas the high priest, in the court of Pontius Pilate, and finally on Mount Calvary, He permitted nothing to turn Him aside.

He must die, the just for the unjust, the sinless one for those covered with sin, the holy God for sin-cursed men. All this we must keep in mind, if we want to understand what happened in Bethany as Mary anointed Jesus with precious ointment.

Furthermore, all this we must keep in mind, if we want to understand what is taking place here in church this Palm Sunday morning. What is it that gives meaning to our worship? What is it that gives meaning to the hymns we sing, the prayers we pray, the Word of God we hear, the offerings we bring, and the benediction that is spoken over bowed heads?

What is it that gives meaning to the confession of faith we confess today and each Sunday? What is it that gives meaning to the vow you spoke on your Confirmation Day with deep devotion and great earnestness? What is it that made your confirmation so happy an occasion both for them and for the entire congregation?

All we say and do this Palm Sunday here in our house of worship has meaning only and alone because of the death of Jesus. Without the death of Jesus all we do and say in this worship service would be meaningless, and a waste of time.

However, because of the death of Jesus, all we say and do in faith this day fills our hearts with peace, our lives with purpose, and our souls with everlasting hope.

Thus we read in the Bible, *“Christ died for our sins.”*³ *And you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, ...*¹⁹ *but with the precious blood of Christ.*⁴

Because Christ died for us and our sin, we can exult with the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55–57, ⁵⁵ *“O Death, where is your sting? O [grave], where is your victory?”* ⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

You see, just as the impending death of Christ gave rich meaning and lasting significance to Mary’s act of anointing Jesus on the evening before the first Palm Sunday, Christ’s death gives meaning, significance, joy, and blessing to all we say and do in faith this Palm Sunday.

2. Palm Sunday Is A Day Of Joy And Blessing Provided We Remember In Faith Our Saviour’s Triumph Over Death

But that is not all. If Palm Sunday is to be to us the day of joy and blessing we want it to be, then we must consider a further truth: that Jesus who suffered death also triumphed over death. Also this we learn from the word of God before us.

Although no direct reference is made to our Saviour’s triumph over death in this portion of Scripture, note the many indirect references.

In verse 1 we read that at the supper in Bethany Lazarus was present, who had been dead but was raised up from the dead by Jesus.

In verse 9 we read that many Jews knew about the raising of Lazarus and therefore came to Bethany to see both Jesus and Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised up from the dead.

In verse 18 we read that many of the people met Jesus and strewed palm branches along the way because of the power Jesus had demonstrated over death through the raising of Lazarus.

And in verse 16 we read that the disciples did not understand the significance of the palm branches and the chant of the people, who cried out along the way: *“Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ The King of*

Israel!” until after the Lord Jesus was glorified, that is, until after He triumphed over death, namely His resurrection.

You see, just as the anointing of Jesus assumes its full significance only when considered in the light of the Lord’s death, so the Lord’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem assumes its full significance only when considered in the light of His triumph over death.

If the Lord Jesus had not triumphed over death, if He had not risen from the dead on the third day, the palm branches which were strewn along the way and the chant with which the people greeted Him: ***Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’*** would have been meaningless, and even hollow mockery.

However, because of the Lord’s triumph over death everything that was said and done along the way as He entered Jerusalem becomes highly significant and eternally true.

Likewise, it is our Saviour’s triumph over death that gives eternal meaning and significance to everything we say and do today.

During your own confirmation instructions you were taught: ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”***⁵

Furthermore, you were taught: ***4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.***⁶

Again you were taught: ***4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.***⁷

Still again you were taught that ***the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.***⁸

Every Sunday we make a public confession of what we have learned and what we believe, using the words of the Apostles’ or Nicene Creed. On the day

of your Confirmation you pledged a lifetime allegiance to Jesus Christ, your blessed Lord and beautiful Saviour.

But now tell me: What would all this be worth? What would it mean? What would it profit you if Christ had not triumphed over death, if Christ had not come forth from the tomb in Joseph's garden?

The apostle Paul answers in 1 Corinthians 15:17–18, ¹⁷ *And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!* ¹⁸ *Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*

However, since Christ has risen from the dead, all that which you have learned to know and to believe about Christ is true. Your faith rests on a sure foundation. Your pledge of lifelong faithfulness to Christ is a glorious pledge. Your Saviour's confirmation promise to you *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life,”* is a blessed promise.

Here, then, is the explanation of why Palm Sunday is a day of joy and blessing to us. It is not only the Sunday which immediately precedes Good Friday and Easter, but also the Sunday which draws the wondrous events of these two days together by emphasising, on the one hand, our Saviour's death and, and on the other hand, our Saviour's triumph over death.

So, as often as you think of Palm Sunday, also remember your own Confirmation and remember the meaning of Mary's act of anointing Jesus, and remember the meaning of the palm branches and the hosannas which welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem.

Finally, remember that *“Christ was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification.”*⁹ This simple sentence sums up the joy and the blessedness of Palm Sunday, the joy and blessedness of your own confirmation, and the joy and blessedness of being a Christian. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Revelation 2:10

² Rom. 6:23

³ 1 Cor. 15:3

⁴ 1 Peter 1:18–19

⁵ John 3:16

⁶ Galatians 4:4-5

⁷ Isaiah 53:4-5

⁸ 1 John 1:7

⁹ Rom. 4:25