

## Psalm 118:19-29

Palm Sunday, March 24, 2024  
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

***Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. 20 This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. 21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. 22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. 23 This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. 25 Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD. 27 The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar! 28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. 29 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!***

In 2001, a baseball team from New York City took the world by storm. It wasn't the Yankees. It was a 12-year-old Little League All-Star team competing in the Little League World Series. You may know what that is, but if you don't, the Little League World Series is a summer baseball tournament featuring teams from around the world, all the players falling in the 11 and 12-year-old age group. *This* team was from the Bronx, and they were carried on the back of their dominant pitcher Danny Almonte. Danny was an intimidating 5'8"—much taller than most 12-year-olds—and his fastball hurtled toward the plate at 79 mph. He was the best 12-year-old pitcher on the planet, and there wasn't a single team in the tournament that could beat him. In fact, he only needed to face 72 batters, and he struck out 62 of them. He was an overnight sensation.

The only problem was that Danny Almonte wasn't 12 years old; he was 14. And *that* became quite the scandal. Because of this, the record books were retroactively changed, and now history shows that this 12-year-old all star team from the Bronx had forfeited all of their games. As it turns out, it's not fair to have a high schooler playing against 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

Every so often, this type of scandal pops up in youth sports, where a team brings in a ringer to play as a substitute on the team. Substitutes are allowed, but they need to be at the *same* level as their competition. If some unfair advantage is gained, say with an older player acting as a substitute, then the substitute will be declared invalid, and the games will be forfeited.

And when we think of *Jesus* as our Substitute, there's a similar requirement in place. *The* overarching theme of all Scripture is that Jesus served as our Substitute. Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians, ***"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died."*** (5:14) Jesus came as our *substitute*, to take our place. He came to be punished and to die, and since He's being substituted in our place, it means we won't go through the same punishment. Now, to *do* that, He couldn't be only God. He had to level the playing field for Himself. So, He became true man. The result is something that we can't totally understand: Jesus was, at the same time, fully God *and* fully man. And as true man, He went through all of the same temptations and trials and pains that every single other human goes through, yet He remained sinless through it all. And then as an equal substitute, Jesus took on rejection and shame; He endured beating. People wounded Him until He bled, and then they nailed His body to the cross. He accepted all of this, *again*, so that we wouldn't face the same.

Talk about unfair! We're the ones who have committed all the sins to be deserving of this type of treatment. Jesus, on the other hand, was perfect. No charge could be brought against Him, and yet He was still crucified at the hands of unjust men. And yet, there's a twist. All of this unfair treatment of Jesus—the perfect Lamb of God being led to the slaughter—this was, *all of it*, the Lord's doing. God had set this forth as His plan to save sinners, and *God* decided to go through with it. That's the truth verse 23 declares, ***"This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."***

And that will serve as our theme today as we look at the events of Holy Week. Today we'll consider both the events of Palm Sunday *and* Good Friday and recognize that *all* of this was the Lord's doing. And **The LORD's Doing is Always Marvelous.**

There are a number of extremely familiar verses throughout our text, and when we read them all in a chunk, they might seem to be a bit disjointed from one another. But I want to draw your attention first to verse 24: ***"This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*** You could use that verse to describe any day, of course. When you woke up this morning, you could make that your prayer. Today, Sunday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024 ***"is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*** Is that true? Of course! It's another day of grace filled with God's blessings. And even when you come across days that *don't* seem so filled with grace or blessings, we recognize *still* that even those *difficult* days are the days the Lord made that we can rejoice and be glad in.

So, while that statement is true of every day in *general*, it is specifically true of one day in particular. I said before that the verses of our Psalm this morning *seem* to be a bit disjointed, but they all come together in one clear way when you realize that this Psalm is a prophecy regarding the events of Holy Week, beginning with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and ending with Jesus on the cross. And when you look at this section through that lens, you might realize that the *specific* day which God had prepared and in which we can rejoice is the day that Jesus won our salvation on the cross of Calvary.

All of human history led up to this particular week. And regarding the events of this week, we can again confess, ***"This is the Lord's doing."*** The Apostle Peter wrote in his first epistle, ***"He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you."*** (1 Peter 1:20) The necessity of the Son of God's blood being shed was known by God before time even began. Peter also said in his Pentecost sermon, ***"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."*** (Acts 2:23) Again, this was God's plan even before the foundations of the world were laid. Jesus would be delivered into the hands of lawless men and be killed.

So, this was what was really going on as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The time had come. Everything had worked together towards this moment, and Jesus began His walk toward the cross by riding a donkey into the town in which He'd be killed. And again, it's this week, this pivotal moment in history that this Psalm is specifically prophesying about.

You can see Palm Sunday spoken of if you look at verse 25, ***"Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD."*** These verses were actually being quoted by the Palm Sunday crowd. We read in our Palm Sunday account earlier, the crowd shouted, ***"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he***

***who comes in the name of the Lord!***” (Matthew 21:9) The first words of verse 25, ***“Save us, we pray,”***—if you pronounced that phrase in Hebrew, it’s “Hosanna!” “Hosanna”/”Save us, we pray” it’s the same word. So, these people who saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem—they knew who Jesus was. It had been just down the road in Bethany that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Many people knew about this, and from this sign they had deduced that Jesus was the Messiah! They recognized that Jesus was the one prophesied about in *this* Psalm—the One coming in the name of the Lord—so they welcomed Him as such, ***“Hosanna! (Save us, we pray!)”***

So great was the clamor at Jesus’ entry, that the Pharisees are reported by John as having said, ***“Look, the world has gone after Him.”*** (John 12:19b) They had already been busy plotting Jesus’ downfall, and *now* it looked as if He was untouchable—the most popular person in the world! But what they *didn’t* expect is that God’s eternal plan was for Jesus to be *rejected* by the world, for the cries of “hosanna” to be replaced by cries of “crucify Him!”

And so, it happened. The crowd that welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday as a conquering hero were greatly disappointed as the week wore on. We know that most of them likely had in mind that the Messiah was there to kick out the Romans and establish a new world order with Himself sitting on the throne in Jerusalem! And yet, shortly after His triumphal entry Jesus starts explaining to the crowds that He must be lifted up on the cross and be killed. Then, He enters into the temple, that place of great nationalistic pride for the Jews, and He drives everyone out. Then, He’s asked whether the people should be paying taxes to Caesar, and Jesus says that they *are* to ***“render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.”*** (Mark 12:17) They *are* to be paying their taxes to that very same ruler that the Jews had thought the Messiah had come to overthrow.

So great was their disappointment that by the end of the week, the world had abandoned Jesus, just as God had planned. *Now* the crowd cried out against Him, ***“Crucify Him!” “His blood be on us and on our children!”*** (Matthew 27:25) Even His disciples abandoned Him; scattering when the night grew darkest, which, by the way, was also foreknown by God as He declared through the prophet Zechariah, ***“Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”*** (Zechariah 13:7) All that was left was for Jesus to be lifted up and bound to the cross with nails through His hands and feet.

This too is prophesied in our text, in verse 27. ***“Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!”*** The Psalmist pictures for us the altar that was set out in the courtyard in front of the tabernacle. This was a large altar, eight feet on each side. And on this altar, there were horns sticking out. It was on those horns that the high priest would sprinkle the blood of the sin offerings that were sacrificed for the sins of the people. And here, the Psalmist says, ***“Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!”*** He’s showing us what would be the ultimate outcome of the events of Holy Week. Yes, Jesus would ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday with the palm branches waving. Yes, He would be rejected by the chief leaders and the elders of the people. Yes, He would be rejected even by His own disciples. But ultimately, this would all lead to Jesus being sacrificed on the cross.

This verse stands in such stark contrast with the rest of the section. Just as Holy Week saw such a radical shift in tone from Palm Sunday to Good Friday, we see the same thing here. ***“This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad.” “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!”***

***“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!”*** And then just sandwiched right in the middle: ***“Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar.”*** It seems so out of place! That is, until you realize that this sacrifice is the key to making all of these statements mean anything. We, who are sinners deserving the pains of hell, can rejoice today only because Jesus became the sacrifice bound to the cross. We can give thanks to the Lord today, not trying to earn His favor and with no sense of trepidation, only because Jesus became the sacrifice bound to the cross. Jesus was treated as the animal sacrifice. This was the Lord’s doing, and we can rejoice and be glad.

I don’t know if you’ve ever seen “The Passion of the Christ,” before. I saw it once, and I think that will be the only time I watch it. Mel Gibson, when he wrote and directed that movie, strove to show Jesus’ agony on Good Friday in all of its gory details. His goal was to stir in the viewer a sense of real sorrow, showing the pain and suffering in ways you couldn’t ignore, so that every viewer would leave the showing overcome with sadness. And it was effective; you could not watch that movie and leave without being totally overwhelmed by the horrifying responsibility you bear for your sins which put Jesus through that turmoil.

And that is an appropriate response to Good Friday. It is beneficial for us to take a serious assessment of our sinful lives and to recognize that it was we who crucified Jesus. But if that’s *all* that we do, if all we’re left with is the sorrow, then we’re missing the whole point of Good Friday. We’re missing the whole point of that week that began with Palm Sunday, and we’re missing the point of this Psalm. This Psalm, which prophesies and encapsulates the events of Holy Week, is one overflowing with joy. It concludes with that extremely familiar verse, ***“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!”*** That’s so familiar for us as Lutherans because that is the conclusion to the common table prayer that Lutherans use. And that’s a fitting prayer before a table decked with food, but it’s an exceedingly *more* appropriate prayer as we consider the events of Holy Week.

Our Psalm begins, ***“Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.”*** That’s our plea to God, “Open to us the gates of righteousness. Open to us the halls of heaven.” We can’t open them ourselves, and by rights, we cannot enter at all. After all, it’s only the righteous who can pass through those doors. And we’re sinners. But God had a plan.

That plan? Jesus would become a man. He would become a satisfactory substitute, bringing Himself down to our playing field. He would resist temptation, beating back against the Devil with only the Word of God. He would ride into Jerusalem with a heavy burden upon His shoulders. He would come to His own, and His own would not receive Him. (cf. John 1:11) Rejected by the world, He would be led outside the city as a criminal to be mounted upon that cruel execution device. Forsaken by the Father, abandoned by His disciples, He would die alone. . . alone with our sins. ***“This is (all of this) the Lord’s doing; and it is marvelous in our eyes.”*** Marvelous, because the result God’s plan is that those gates of righteousness are now opened to sinners like us, and we will enter through it. What more appropriate response could we have than, ***“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.”*** Amen. ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.