

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle  
Palm Sunday  
24 March 2013  
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita  
Jn 12:12-19

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

We live in a world where things are often learned backwards.

We say, “I wish I would’ve known that before...”  
and, “Hindsight is 20/20...”

Some things just don’t make sense at the time,  
but later, when the dust settles, we see it all so clearly.

Both joy and sorrow work this way.  
After a surprise birthday party, the one surprised thinks back over all the odd details of the past week or month:

“Ah, *that’s* why she said that!”

And when a couple suffers a divorce,  
the wife replays every event in her mind—and everything begins to make sense.

That’s how life works.  
And the Passion of Christ is no different.

Holy Week starts today with a young donkey and a load of palm branches.  
It’s a bit of a frenzy:

large crowds gathering around Jesus,  
singing and shouting the praises of the coming king and messiah,  
“*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord,  
even the King of Israel!*” (Jn 12:13)

The disciples went along with it—  
how could they not?—  
it was exciting, climactic, could this really be the King?

And then John tells us:  
“*His disciples did not understand these things at first,  
but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written  
about Him and had been done to Him.*” (12:16)

That is, none of this made any sense at all until the events at the end of the week—  
Jesus is glorified in those sacred three days: Cross, Burial, Resurrection.

Now, Palm Sunday comes right on the heels of Jesus’ last great sign.  
Lazarus was just raised from the dead and this really got people talking.  
That’s why the crowds were there,  
“*The reason why the crowd went to meet Him was that they heard He had done this sign.*” (12:18)

But the raising of Lazarus also got the Pharisees talking.

They said,

*“What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.  
If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him,  
and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”* (11:47-48)

John also tells us that from the day they heard about Lazarus,

*“they made plans to put Jesus to death.”* (11:53)

On Palm Sunday we feel the panic and fear of the Pharisees.

*“The Pharisees said to one another,  
‘You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!’* (12:19)

They must act quickly.

That’s how fear works.

That’s what life is like under the Law, under coercion, under the threat of death.

Everything that the Pharisees know will come tumbling down if this really is the king.

He’ll tick the Romans off and then they’ll really come and leave us destroyed.

The Pharisees fear that they’ll lose power, their way of life, their comfort, they’re pride.

They better act quickly if they want to get control—  
take back their city, their temple, their lives!

But this becomes the greatest irony of all.

No one would’ve guessed it at the time—  
not even the disciples.

The Pharisees thought that the only way to keep their lives was to kill the Christ.

The only way to put an end to what He stood for—His teaching and His signs—was His death.

Caiaphas said it best:

*“You do not understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people,  
not that the whole nation should perish.”* (12:50)

Caiaphas was the High Priest.

His office and work was the slaughtering of innocent animals as substitutes for the people.

He saw this Jesus as no different.

Better to save the people than this one man.

That’s the irony of ironies.

What Caiaphas meant for evil, expediency, pure utilitarianism—

God turned for our greatest good!

Thank you, Caiaphas.  
 Thank you, Pharisees.  
 Thank you, ignorant disciples and unruly crowds.  
 Thank you, to those who shouted “*Crucify, crucify Him*” (Lk 23:20).

For you have offered the one sacrifice we so desperately needed!  
 You have given over the sinless one to be sin for us!

The King you mocked and beat and scourged—  
 whom you clothed with purple robes, and crowned with thorns,  
 whose cross was marked and given the inscription:  
 “*This is the King of the Jews*” (23:38)—  
 this lowly King, this Jesus, finds strength in weakness; He conquers in His death.

They expected that if Jesus lived,  
 He would form a kingdom of all people: Jews and Gentiles together.  
 They couldn’t have that.

But what they never saw coming was that He accomplishes all of this not by living, but dying.

They brought about their own downfall.

And it all gets rolling today, on Palm Sunday,  
 where the King makes His triumphal entry.

No eyes would recognize Him as any king worth His salt,  
 but only the eyes of faith.

Only those who have heard the promises,  
 who see in retrospect,  
 who know the end, and believe in this lowly King who rises from the grave!

To us, this Jesus comes again.  
 Our eyes will surely miss Him,  
 but our ears will lay hold Him,  
 and our mouths will receive Him.

Faith comes by hearing,  
 and hearing through the word of Christ.

And Christ has become flesh and in this Supper, dwells among us.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*