

**“H-U-M-I-L-I-T-Y!”**

*“Have this mind among yourselves, which is your in Christ Jesus ...” Philippians 2:5.*

“V-I-C-T-O-R-Y! Victory! Victory! That’s our cry!” I imagine that it was the start to the March Madness tournament that brought this cheer to mind. However, the cheer itself reminds me of the days that I played trumpet in the pep bands for high school and college. Whether it was yelling out cheers, or playing songs like “The Eye of the Tiger” or “The Final Countdown”, I enjoyed supporting my high school and college teams as they defended our home territory. Whether it was the home turf or court, I wanted to encourage our players to do what we all wanted – protect our house and avoid the humiliation of the opponent gaining victory in our space.

While there’s no doubt that the home crowd, cheerleaders and band have different roles than the players in sporting events. There is unity between the crowd, cheerleaders, band and players in that moment because they share the same opponent. The goal is the same for each of these groups – victory over the opponent!

This weekend, we remember Jesus’ Triumphal Entry. We speak of this day and event as Palm Sunday, the beginning of the most critical week in Jesus’ earthly life. And our annual reflection of this moment, recalls the crowd’s cheers and chants as they wave the symbol of victory, palm branches, in great expectation of Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem.

In some ways, this moment could look to us like an ancient pep rally. The people are pumped! Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead and now it’s time for the Passover feast. Excitement and fervor are quickly growing into a frenzy! Jesus is arriving with great expectations. Numerous signs seem to point to Jesus as the next king and deliverer to come in and defend the home territory, Jerusalem and the temple.

Yet, in the midst of this growing anticipation, there was a major problem. Jesus and the people were far apart on who was actually the opponent. For the crowds coming to the Passover feast, with the context of this moment and their past history, there couldn’t be a clearer opponent than, Rome! For Moses, it was the Egyptians, for Joshua it was the Canaanites and numerous other “-ites”, for Gideon, the Midianites, for Samson and King David, the Philistines. Time and time again, the Lord had raised up individuals to defend Israel’s homeland. So, we can certainly see how the people of Jesus’ time would be hoping for history to repeat itself as Jesus rode into Roman occupied, Jerusalem.

But, the words Jesus spoke following this powerful procession made it clear that Rome wasn’t ultimately the opponent He had come to deal with. Jesus spoke of dying. He spoke of suffering and selfless service. He spoke of His troubled soul. Even when Jesus mentioned casting out the ruler of this world, it was connected to being lifted up, dying on a cross. None of these statements, exuded a confident deliverer coming to handle Rome the way they likely imagined. Rather, all these statements from Jesus appeared to play right into their opponent’s hands in the most humiliating way possible.

Not surprisingly, Jesus’ words weren’t a rallying cry the people wanted to understand, believe or follow. And now, all the excitement and fervor were fading. Jesus didn’t ascend into the limelight of that moment that the people laid before Him, but instead He left the frenzy and hid from them. Even the many signs He had done throughout His earthly ministry lost their momentum among many of these people. Still others wanted to believe in Him, but they couldn’t, because they idolize the glory of men more than this strange, upside down glory of Jesus, the Son of God.

And so, just days after this majestic moment, Jesus’ royal ride, the crowd who welcomed Him so expectantly changed their tune. Stirred up by the religious leaders, the people, many even from that Palm Sunday crowd, began to chant a different phrase. C-R-U-C-I-F-Y! Crucify! Crucify! became their cry. With these words, the people unknowingly exposed Jesus’ true opponents – themselves. Along with Rome and the other Gentiles, Jesus’ own lineage, the people of Israel, this Palm Sunday

crowd, even His own disciples, were the opponents He came to deal with. And in the most humbling turn of events, Jesus willingly fulfilled their cry, C-R-U-C-I-F-Y! Crucify! Crucify! and so Jesus died.

This difficult reality remains true for us this day as well. Even though many years separate us from the original Palm Sunday celebration, the confusion on opponents continues. Jesus needs to deal with those people over there and these people over here, but we quickly fail to remember that Jesus needs to deal with us too. Our own sinful hearts, our own sinful lives, betray the fact that we are just as much Jesus' opponents as any other person in this world. Our words and actions may not sound and look exactly like those that put Jesus on the cross years ago. But our own rebellious words and actions are also the reason, Jesus willingly came to die.

Through this difficult reality, comes the most amazing truth of all. Jesus forgives His opponents! Back then upon the cross, Jesus cried out for the Father to forgive all those who didn't know what they were doing. And by His death upon the cross, Jesus really won forgiveness for the world, for each of us who have lived opposed to His will for our lives. So, in a stunning reversal, Jesus' victory over sin, death and the devil actually came through what looked like devastating and humiliating defeat. And in a merciful turn of events, Jesus rose victorious not to seek revenge on His opponents, but instead to bring them into His own victory over sin, death and the devil.

In view of this mercy, we too say, "Hosanna! Save us, we pray!" And this weekend, this is exactly what Jesus has done for you and for me. By His Word, He has led us to recognize our sins and that these sins have made us His opponents. He has called us to sorrowfully confess and repent of these sins acknowledging our shortcomings as well as our desire to turn from these selfish ways. And by the Holy Spirit, our hearts and ears have been opened to receive and believe the forgiveness He won for us and delivers to us. By His grace, He claims us not as opponents, but as His very own children right now and for all of eternity.

Like with ancient Israel following that original Passover week, our Savior, Deliverer and King, leads us through water from death to life. He daily drowns, the Old Adam, our sinful nature, saving us from the eternal consequences of sin, death and the devil. And just as He came to that Palm Sunday crowd to win for them forgiveness, Jesus continues to come among us with His Body and Blood to personally deliver to us the forgiveness He won for us as the very Lamb of God.

In light of all that Jesus has done, our tune changes as well. No longer do we boast in personal, religious and spiritual victories as the important and crucial marks of our restored and redeemed life in Christ. No, rather, we boast in Jesus' humble and victorious work through the cross and over the grave. We live lives of sacrifice and compassion because of what Christ has done for us. We seek to have our lives point to Jesus in all that we say and do so that others who wish to see Jesus, might see our lives as evidence of His Word and Sacraments at work.

We cling to Christ's humility. His willingness to leave His heavenly throne and become man. His willingness to suffer and die even upon the cross for each and every one of us. And from His humility, we pray that our Lord and Savior would lead us to live humble lives under His care for His glory until He comes again. So, as we wait for Christ's return, H-U-M-I-L-I-T-Y! Humility! Humility! is now our cry! Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan