

Palm Sunday – Matthew 21:1-11; Philippians 2:5-11 – April 16/17, 2011

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm a huge history buff. Growing up I would read or watch whatever I could that pertained to history. It didn't matter if it was about dinosaurs, or if it was about ancient Greece or Rome, or if it was about the Revolutionary War or World War II. I just loved to soak up history. As I got older, my tastes got refined a bit. I was much more interested in human history, the rising and falling of empires, what people did to live and survive day to day, how battles were fought, etc. Then as my tastes got more refined I started to read about specific people; Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Attila, Genghis Khan, Napoleon Bonaparte, etc. Many of those great people we consider great as leaders have something in common. Here's what the Frenchman Napoleon had to say; "***Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but what foundation did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded an empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him.***"

Those great leaders used force, the power of military, the power to drive fear and trembling in the hearts of men and women, and all for what? To conquer, to take land, to take money, to take people; to have power over someone else. Today we remember our king, Jesus Christ, who is the exact opposite of what a king should look like or act like. In stead of coming into Jerusalem on a stallion, he comes upon a donkey. In your mind's eye, just think what that may have looked like. Or think of it like this; imagine Obama or the Queen of England coming in to Washington D.C. or wherever it is that the Queen of England needs to go (Buckingham Palace), imagine them traveling not in a limo, not with a secret service, not with any military support being hidden just in case, imagine them without anything but a simple beast of burden; a donkey. Once you picture that, then can you start to imagine the humility of Jesus coming into Jerusalem. He had no backup, no secret service, except some disciples that would soon abandon him. He had no one to honor him, the Son of God, except a crowd that one

day would say, "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," while the next day the same crowd will be shouting, "Let him be crucified...crucify him." Here comes your king, riding on a donkey.

You know, what Napoleon said about Jesus is only partly true. Jesus founded not an empire, but a people. And Jesus is still looking for more people to be his people. Jesus did come to love, and comes to you all today through the preached word and through the sacrament of Holy Communion to give his love for you, but he also came to serve, not to be served but to serve. He came to be an example for us to imitate.

Now, what I want to say right away is that none of you will ever perfectly imitate Jesus. There are some people who may think that Christians need to imitate Jesus in every single way, but that's just not possible. But that doesn't mean we should try to live, love, and serve as Jesus lived, loved, and served. Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday primarily are not days celebrating how great God is, but they are days in which we remember the lengths that God went to to get through to us, to get through to you. The text for today from Philippians is an excellent bit of Scripture that we should listen to that touches on this. So let's walk through that now

The Apostle Paul right at the beginning of this reading tells you, "Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." And when Paul means you, he not only meant to the church in Philippi, but he also means you who are reading this, you who are hearing this.

What type of mind are we to have? Paul explains in this passage the following verses and we could sum up what he says in one word: Obedience. Jesus did what his Father wanted him to do, even if that meant death on a cross.

What does that mean for us? Well, here's a good way to start, a way to help you make a connection:

Remember the text from Matthew? What are people throwing under neath him as he walks to

Jerusalem on the donkey? Coats and branches. Think of it this way: What are some things I need to

throw at Jesus' feet for him to trample on so that I might live, love, and serve my Lord better, so that I

might have the mind of Christ?

Is it a past that you aren't proud of that you need to throw away?

Is it a future that others have set for me that you can't live up to?

Is it a particular way of thinking that you need to change...am you too optimistic or too pessimistic?

Is it a particular sinful activity I find myself engaged in; abusing drugs, alcohol, etc.

Are you full of pride, that you can handle everything on your own w/ no help from anyone else?

Or is there something you need to take up to listen, to have this mind of Christ in you? Pray, Scripture, meditation, being in a group, etc.?

Lent has traditionally been a time of self-reflection. As you go about your ways serving where God has called you, let this week be a week where you do a serious gut check to your faith. Figure out what you need to let Christ trample on. Christ calls us to let go, to leave behind, and to follow him.