

Palm Sunday/Confirmation Day

April 1, 2007

Luke 19: 28-40

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

Disciples of the King, Bring Him Your Praise

1. Praise him with your lips
2. Praise him with your lives

^{NIV} Luke 19:28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ They replied, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: ³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" ⁴⁰ "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

The events of the first Palm Sunday show Christian discipleship as it was intended to be. At Jesus' command, two disciples go off to find the donkey Jesus has designated and bring it back to him. When they come back with the colt, the disciples drape their cloaks over the donkey and join in putting Jesus on the back of the colt. By these actions, the disciples were acclaiming Jesus as their King. Then while Jesus rode down from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, his disciples lifted their voices in praise of Jesus for all the miracles they had seen. "*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*" They were praising Jesus as their King and they were praising God for sending him. What a beautiful interlude this is as we approach Good Friday! This is the way you'd like to imagine Jesus would be universally received—by adoring crowds who know just who he is and why he's come.

Today, as we combine the celebration of Palm Sunday with the confirmation of seven young members of our congregation, is a fitting time to contemplate this King to whom we confess our allegiance and to think about what it means to be his disciple. Confirmation is really just a milestone on the path of a lifetime of discipleship, a life of learning from Jesus and praising him. Let's look, first of all, at how the disciples of the King bring him the praise of their lips.

1. Praise him with your lips

At the end of this lesson we notice that not everyone joined in bringing praise to King Jesus. Some Pharisees in the crowd found Jesus' disciples annoying. They didn't like the volume with which these disciples were bringing Jesus the praise of their lips. But Jesus defended his disciples. To the suggestion that he rebuke them for praising him so loudly, he replied, "*I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.*" That is, it's impossible for Jesus not to have the praise that's due him. He is the one the disciples proclaimed him to be: The King who comes in the name of the Lord. The Messiah. The Savior of the world. He is the living, breathing fulfillment of dozens of Old Testament prophecies that declared him to be everything from the Seed of the Woman (Gen. 3:15) to the Messenger of the Covenant (Mal. 3:1).

This Palm Sunday reception of Jesus, while a bit unusual by our standards, was the way the King's coming to Jerusalem had been prophesied five centuries earlier. Zechariah said, "Rejoice! your King comes to you." Jesus is a King, yes. But he's a different sort of King. He rules not simply for his own glory, but for the good of his subjects. He comes humbly, on the back of a lowly beast of burden, but he comes as King nevertheless. He comes perfectly equipped to fight for his subjects and defend us from our enemies. His humility as he comes to Jerusalem, this stronghold of opposition to him, is proof we were more valuable to him than his own physical safety. Though he has unlimited power, Jesus comes armed only with his love for those he came to save. And his disciples rejoiced and praised him with their lips.

It's worth asking how, in this place that was swarming with conspiracies to kill Jesus, the disciples had come to know Jesus as their King. The answer is here: They knew him as King because they heard what Jesus said and they saw the miracles he did. The word of Jesus had worked on their hearts and the miracles of Jesus reinforced what he said.

Today you members of the confirmation class of 2007 will do what the disciples did on Palm Sunday. They lifted up their voices to praise Jesus and so will you. Their words of praise demonstrated that they knew who Jesus was. They said, "*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.*" And your words of praise will also demonstrate to your families and friends that you know who Jesus is—God's only Son, our Lord. Like those first disciples, you, too, have come to know Jesus by listening to him. God put someone into your life to tell you about Jesus and who he is and what he's done for you: parents and grandparents, teachers and pastors. God saw to it that you heard. And he saw to it that your hearing led to faith in Jesus. Today is your day to lift up your voice in a formal way to praise God. You're going to praise God the Father who gave you life in the first place and has given you health and preserved you to this day. You're going to praise Jesus for the peace he's given you by forgiving your sins and for the hope he's given you by rising from the grave. And you're going to praise the Holy Spirit for using his word and the water of baptism to bring you to the faith that you're going to express today. And we're going to rejoice over what God has done in you and what he pledges to continue doing.

But it would be a mistake to think that this Confirmation Day is just about giving a few right answers at Friday night's examination and being handed a certificate this morning. If that's all it is, then we should probably spare ourselves the effort. Pastor Caauwe's intention as he taught you this year was to help you on your way to heaven. Whether he said it in so many words each week or not, his goal through his teaching is to see you in heaven one day. This was not throwaway, irrelevant stuff he was teaching you. These words of Jesus are words of everlasting life. You've been dealing with matters of eternal significance in confirmation class. But that raises a question: If confirmation class has ultimately been preparing you for heaven, what are you going to do in the time that remains before Jesus takes you to heaven? If God graciously gives you the average lifespan and you have 70 or 80 more years to live here on earth, what are you going to do with all that time between Confirmation Day and the day you go to heaven? Our Palm Sunday Gospel provides the answer.

2. Praise him with your lives

Did you notice in this lesson that the disciples did more than simply praise Jesus with their lips? They also served him in a way that expressed their faith in him. The two disciples went to fetch that donkey colt. The owners of the colt obliged and let the disciples take it when informed that the Lord had need of it. You see disciples spreading their cloaks on the back of the donkey, while others lift Jesus and put him on the donkey. Still other disciples laid their cloaks in the road that Jesus was traveling. It wasn't just words they used to praise Jesus; their actions praised him, too.

Jesus wants you to praise him, too, not just with words today, but with your life. You may not have a donkey to offer Jesus. You may not have the opportunity to soften his path with your coat, but you do have blessings and abilities that you can use to his glory. God made you just the way you are, just the way he wanted you to be. At your age you're beginning to see the special gifts he's given you, the interests and aptitudes and opportunities. You're also approaching an exciting but very challenging time of life as you prepare to go off to high school. Right now you have opportunities to praise your King, Jesus, with your lives. You can praise him by the way you interact with your parents, by the friends you choose, and by the use you make of your time. And, above all, you can praise him by continuing to hear and learn his word and by treasuring opportunities to receive the Lord's Supper. This is where your King comes to you.

But something as good as this won't happen uncontested. Our sinful natures are self-centered to the core. Left unchecked, your sinful nature will soon succeed in making life all about you, or maybe leave you with a thin veneer of Christianity covering a life that's really just selfish. What you'll want to learn to ask yourself regularly is, "How can I serve God today through my role as a son or daughter, brother or sister, student, coworker or friend?" It will be a mark of spiritual maturity when it becomes evident that your life is not just about you, that like your Savior you're willing to serve for the good of others. That praises Jesus in a way that selfish living never can.

But if this is going to happen, then you'll need God's strength to accomplish it. At this point you've developed some basic skills as Bible students. I urge you to continue to

develop these abilities. Today you're also going to be invited to begin participating in Holy Communion, this heavenly meal where the weary find strength and those sick with sin find healing. I encourage you to leverage what you've been given to continue growing in the faith. You'll soon be going off to high school. You'll be granted more independence than you've ever had. Use that independence to God's glory, by choosing to hear the word and receive Communion.

You and I both know that you're not going to be perfect at this. In fact, every day you're going to fall short of the intentions of your New Self. But don't give up hope. Jesus, your King, came to this world for sinners like us. You've learned to call him Father. Now come to him confidently to receive forgiveness and strength and peace. Confess your sins and then find the comfort of your forgiveness in the word and in your baptism and in the Lord's Supper. He's the one who says to you through his prophet Isaiah, **“Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and rescue you.”** (Is. 46:4)

A few years ago when we moved Confirmation Day to Palm Sunday I was a bit concerned. We had been having Confirmation Day on Pentecost where there was an easy connection with the Holy Spirit's work of creating and sustain faith in Jesus. But what was the link going to be with Palm Sunday? But you see it here, don't you? Those disciples on Palm Sunday welcomed Jesus as their King and praised him with their lips and with their lives. That's a pretty good summary of what Jesus wants all his disciples to do and what we pray God by his grace will enable you to do. Disciples of the King, bring him your praise! Amen.