

SERMON NOTES

Second Palm Sunday

Synaxis Gospel
John 12:12-23

THE HOUR HAS COME

INTRODUCTION

Our reading today is from St. John's record of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem five days before His crucifixion, and one week before His Resurrection. We refer to that day as Palm Sunday. When we celebrated Palm Sunday seven weeks ago, we read the account of Jesus' entry from the Gospel of Matthew. Now, one week before Pentecost, we will study that event once more, but this time through the eyes of St. John.

In chapter 11, John related the death of Jesus' dear friend Lazarus. When Jesus called Lazarus to life again after four days in the tomb, it was an awesome miracle. The other Gospel writers do not record it.¹ John, however, views the event as crucial to understanding the joyous reaction of the crowds on Palm Sunday, as Jesus rode into the city. It also explains the decision of the rulers to kill Jesus as soon as possible.

John's chronology is as follows:

Jesus was in Perea with at least some of His close disciples including Thomas and, no doubt, John.²

After the sisters of Lazarus sent for Jesus, He arrived four days after the burial of their brother.³

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, witnessed by a crowd of mourners, some of whom reported the event to the rulers in Jerusalem.⁴

The rulers made up their minds that Jesus must die saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." From that day, they planned to kill Him.⁵

¹ Luke was not present. He was not one of the twelve disciples, and his Gospel is the result of research. There are indications in the text that lead one to suspect that, probably, neither Peter (from whom we believe Mark got his information) nor, perhaps, Matthew was with Jesus when He raised up Lazarus from the dead. For instance, instead of Peter taking his usual lead, it was Thomas who spoke up in the decision to follow Jesus to the death.

² This is the vicinity where John the Baptist had been baptizing at first [John 10:40].

³ John 11:17.

⁴ John 11:45-46.

⁵ John 11:47, 53.

Jesus withdrew to a city called Ephraim and “there He stayed with His disciples”⁶ until it was time for the Passover feast.

Six days before Passover, He arrived with His disciples in Bethany, near Jerusalem, to visit Lazarus and the sisters,⁷ passing through Jericho on the way, as Matthew, Mark and Luke record.⁸ Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointed Jesus with perfume at dinner (Jesus said it was for His burial).⁹

News got out that He was in Bethany, and crowds started to come there. They wanted to see the One who had performed the miracle, and see Lazarus also. This greatly disturbed the rulers of the Jews. People were beginning to believe in Jesus because of this miracle, and so the chief priests decided to kill Lazarus, as well as Jesus¹⁰.

We pick up the story the next day, when news got back to Jerusalem that Jesus was coming to the city. The crowd from Bethany followed, and was joined by the crowd of pilgrims coming out of Jerusalem to meet Him.

SYNTAXIS READING

John 12:12-23

On the next day the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out, “HOSANNA! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel.”

And Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, “FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION, BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY’S COLT.”

These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him.

And so the multitude who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb, and raised him from the dead, were bearing Him witness.

⁶ John 11:54.

⁷ John 12:1. This visit is recorded in Matthew 26:6ff and Mark 14:3ff.

⁸ Matthew 20:29; Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35.

⁹ John 12:3-7.

¹⁰ John 12:9-10.

For this cause also the multitude went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign.

The Pharisees therefore said to one another; "You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him."

Now there were certain Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; these therefore came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and they told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. "

NOTES

On the next day, the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him,

This great crowd of people consisted of pilgrims, who were obliged by the Law to attend the yearly feast of Passover. This group had heard of the miracle of the raising of Lazarus, but was not the crowd that had gone to Bethany.

It is thought that palm trees did not grow naturally in the area of Jerusalem. Palm branches were required at the feast of Tabernacles, and it is thought they were brought in for *that* feast. They were *not* required for Passover. It is, therefore, a puzzle how these palm branches came to be in Jerusalem that day. There is a history of their being used to welcome important persons. Perhaps they were brought by those passing through Jericho, the city of palms. Somehow, the people had them and used them to welcome Jesus.

and began to cry out, "HOSANNA! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel."

The word *hosanna* is an Aramaic expression meaning 'Save, I pray! The people had made up their minds that Jesus is the promised king the prophets foretold.

"In the Name of the LORD' meant 'with the power and authority of God.'¹¹

And Jesus finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, "FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY'S COLT."

John does not give us the detailed account of the acquisition of the donkey that the other Gospel writers included. He simply sums it up with "'finding a young donkey."

This prophecy is from Zechariah 9:9. There it reads however, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion." John has understood the quotation to be a communication to quiet any alarm that the King

¹¹ See the notes on the welcoming cries of the people in the Notes for Palm Sunday.

might be coming to punish the inhabitants. He is not coming against the city. He is riding on a young donkey. This is not the mount of a conqueror, but of One Who comes in peace.

The “daughter” is a metaphor for the people of the city. ‘Zion’ is a poetic title for Jerusalem. The easternmost of the two hills of Jerusalem has the name Zion, and was the location of the fortress.

By Jesus’ day, the prophecy from Zechariah had long been held by the rabbis to be a prophecy of the Messiah, so Jesus’ action would be taken as a claim that He, indeed, is the Christ.¹²

John did not include the details of this welcome that the other writers chose to include. Rather, John chose to emphasize the effect that the Lazarus event had on the people and the rulers.

These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him.

The disciples had not made the connection at the time between the ancient prophecies and the events in Jesus’ life, especially this fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9. It was only later, after the Resurrection, probably during the forty days between the Resurrection and His Ascension, when they were ready to understand what Jesus taught them.

“When Jesus was glorified” has been interpreted in different ways. Some scholars believe it refers to the Ascension and enthronement of Christ at the right hand of the Father in heaven.¹³ Others define it as “after His Resurrection.”¹⁴ Still others include His death as well as His Resurrection in His glorification.¹⁵

If we take only this statement, it would seem that they remembered *after* the Resurrection, for until that time, they were distraught, and did not understand. But Jesus implies that His glorification did indeed include His death. In the verses following our reading, 12:24-32, Jesus describes His death for the life of others, connecting it with the hour of His glorification. Moreover, when Judas left to betray our Lord, and began the final process that led to His crucifixion, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of man **glorified**, and God is **glorified** in him.”¹⁶ A further point may be noticed. The Greek τότε here translated *then* can also be translated *after that*. When Jesus was glorified, after that (unspecified time) they remembered etc.”

And so the multitude who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb, and raised him from the dead, were bearing Him witness.

Here, we have a large crowd telling another large crowd that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Their testimony was turning many people away from the view of the Pharisees and chief priests that Jesus was a charlatan. They, instead, believed in Him, that He is the Christ. The chief priests had plotted not only to kill Jesus; but, now, they also plotted to kill Lazarus to eliminate the evidence. However, what could they do against the testimony of this large crowd who had witnessed the miracle?

¹² W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, vol. III* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997) p. 116

¹³ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on John’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978) p. 774.

¹⁴ J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John, Vol. II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928) p. 427.

¹⁵ R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John’s Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) p.239. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943) p. 861-2.

¹⁶ John 13:31. See Lenski’s discussion, p. 862.

For this cause also the multitude went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign.

It is the report of the witnesses that caused the other large crowd to go out to meet Jesus as He approached Jerusalem, riding on the colt of the donkey.

The Pharisees therefore said to one another; “You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him.”

The sight of the crowd’s massive welcome of Jesus as their King proved to the enemies of Jesus that the rulers’ verbal rejection was not influencing the people. They were going to have to move forward with their plan to remove Him permanently.

The phrase used by the Pharisees, “the world has gone after Him,” was meant by them as hyperbole. But John chose to include the visit of members of the wider world, outside the ethnic world of the Jews, to point up the actual truth in their hyperbole. Jesus had attracted not only Jews, but Greeks to Himself. In John’s lifetime, he would see untold thousands from the outside world come to believe in Jesus Christ.

Now there were certain Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; these therefore came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

The term, *Greeks*, could mean Greek speaking Jews. However, the fact that a consultation occurred between two of the disciples before relating the request, suggests that they were not Jews but ethnic Greeks. The Jews did not associate with non-Jews. If they were ethnic Greeks, they were either proselytes or what are termed *God-fearers* (people attracted to the God of the Jews, but not proselytized to the religion). This is indicated by the fact that they were “among those going up to worship at the feast.” The temple’s court of the Gentiles had been set aside by God for this purpose.

Philip was one of two of Jesus’ disciples who had Greek names. (This did not mean that Philip was a non-Jew.)

“See” implies here a request for a meeting.

Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came, and they told Jesus.

Andrew is the other disciple who had a Greek name. He was the brother of Simon Peter. The three of them were from Bethsaida in Galilee, an area populated by many Greeks and Greek speakers. Perhaps, these Greeks seeking Jesus knew them, or of them, from that area.

Peter was a dominant member of the disciples, and possibly, Philip felt that Peter’s brother, Andrew, might have an idea about how they should proceed with this request from Greeks. They decided to take the request to Jesus.

And Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Does “them” refer to Philip and Andrew, or does “them” refer also to the Greeks? Most probably it refers to the two disciples. But if so, was this His reply to the request?

The “hour” of which Jesus speaks is a period of time in which His final hours on earth occurred. This “hour” seems to include His trial and crucifixion and also His Resurrection and Ascension.

Jesus first spoke of this hour at the wedding at Cana, when His mother asked Him to remedy the lack of wine:

*“Jesus said to her, Woman, what have I to do with you? My **hour** has not yet come.”¹⁷*

That the hour referred to His arrest and death can be inferred from the inability of the authorities to arrest Him as in John 7:30:

*“They were seeking therefore to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because his **hour** had not yet come.”¹⁸*

A few verses after our reading, Jesus is quoted as saying that the hour, or the thought of passing through that hour, was troubling to His spirit. This must refer to the final rejection of the people, demonstrated by the trial, and their handing Him over to the Romans for crucifixion. And of course, it would refer to the crucifixion itself, with all the horror of bearing the sin load of mankind and the forsakenness He experienced at that time. The verse reads:

*“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, Father, save me from this **hour**”? But for this purpose I came to this **hour**.”¹⁹*

But Jesus, in the last statement of our reading, associates this hour with His glorification. This further supports the view that the Passion, as well as the Resurrection and Ascension with the subsequent Enthronement, were included in the glorification of Christ.

If this statement referring to the hour of His glorification and the following statements in John 12 were meant to be related to the Greeks, it revealed that they had come to Jerusalem at the very time when the world would witness the great revelation of God’s character. For love of mankind, Jesus would be lifted up on the Cross and, thereby, would “draw all men to Myself.”²⁰ It is there that they must meet Him.

APPLICATION

A few days ago, we celebrated the Ascension of our Lord into Heaven. God seated Him at His right hand “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet.”²¹ Myriads of myriads of angels sing of His glory.²²

But what does *glory* mean? We sometimes think of glory as something physical, such as a great shining brilliance, greater even than the sun. Webster, on the other hand, defines it as “very great praise, honor, or distinction bestowed by common consent.” What did Jesus mean when He said He had glorified the Father? What did He mean when He asked the Father to glorify Him?

God’s glory is Himself. God is glorified when His character is revealed—when all can see the kind of God He really is, completely just, but full of love and mercy and truth.

¹⁷ John 2:4

¹⁸ Another instance of this kind is found in John 8:20: “*These words He spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; and no man seized Him; because His **hour** had not yet come.*”

¹⁹ John 12:27

²⁰ John 12:32

²¹ Ephesians 1:20-22.

²² Revelation 5:11-14.

This revelation of His character is what calls forth the great praise of Webster's definition. No one is like Him; He is more wonderful than words can describe. Jesus glorified the Father by showing us God's character. He showed us God. The Father glorified the Son when He revealed the character of our Lord, when He revealed Who our Lord really is. How did He do this?

The angels tell us in the song they sing with the others in Heaven: "Worthy art Thou . . . for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."²³

In the Synaxis reading, Jesus tells us that it was for this purpose that He came to this earth. He came from the glory that was His in heaven, where all its citizens knew Him to be, as our Creed proclaims, "very God of very God." He came from that glory to the glory of the Cross. For in the horror that He endured for our sakes, His character was revealed for all the world of mankind to see.

What did they see? Indeed, what do *we* see? We see the God Who is so just that He cannot let sins go unpunished. But we see the God Who is so loving and so compassionate that He gladly inflicted that punishment upon Himself, in order to save the guilty ones. Both sides of God's character were revealed on that day, and both sides were completely fulfilled. Both Justice and Love blazed forth, in all their splendid beauty, when Christ died on the Cross for us.

In our reading today, St. John has taken us back once again to Palm Sunday. He has shown us the great crowds that welcomed Jesus as their king because they had heard the testimony of the many who witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead. John has shown us the bitterness of the rulers in Jerusalem, as they helplessly watched the palm waving crowd, and resolved to move forward with their plan to kill Jesus and put a stop to His miracles. John has shown us that it was not only the Jews who were focused on Jesus that day—the world wanted to see Him. And so it would. In five days He would draw all men to Himself.

The hour had come—the hour for which He had been born that first Christmas day in Bethlehem, the hour of our salvation, the hour of His glory, the hour of the Cross.

May God give us the grace to truly understand the import of that hour and to fall on our knees with the angelic hosts and proclaim:

*"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." "To Him Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion for ever and ever."*²⁴

²³ Revelation 5:9-10, 12.

²⁴ Revelation 5:12-13.