

*Texts: Psalm 118:19-23; Luke 19:29-44*

*Subject: Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem*

*Theme: Better Recognize*

*Palm Sunday, Mar. 28, 2021; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

After Easter our family will be taking a few days to go camping, just a couple hours north of Las Vegas. Whenever we get into the car, it never fails - someone will ask - "Are we there yet?" Did you ever hear that question coming from the back seat? 'How much longer?' It's like our kids want to know exactly how many seconds it will take to reach the destination, and can't stand to be in the car more than 5 minutes. As we reach the end of our street, at the first stop light, I fight the urge to just pull over and respond, "Yes! This is it! Here we are! We made it!"

So, "Are we there yet?"

For us all, the excitement has been building for a long time. So many of us have been waiting for what seems like forever, for the trips, the gatherings, the parties, the concerts and festivals, conferences and conventions, the live shows and the movies too! We are longing to get back to some kind of life that we remember, back before the shutdown of 2020. Things are looking better. Nearly one-quarter of the people in our county have received at least one dose of a vaccine. Casinos and restaurants are opening with greater capacity, more businesses are hiring. But we're not yet where we want to be. How will we know when it's really over? How will we know we can really turn the page? It's hard to say.

As we wait, we keep doing the things we know how to do. Maybe that's changed. Maybe we used to go grocery shopping once or twice a week, and now we pick up

curbside, or get them delivered. Maybe we used to dine at a restaurant and are now more accustomed to pick up and no-contact delivery. We FaceTime and Google Hangout and Zoom with friends and family. We stream new movies, and rewatch favorite shows over and over. We worship from home. We do school online, have virtual doctor visits, and dream about seeing the people we love face to face. Our world has changed so much in the last twelve months, we may barely recognize it.

This is not what we expected.

There are plenty who are struggling to figure out how to live in this new reality too. We are still grieving. We are still afraid. Plenty are still out of work. Young people are struggling to figure out where they fit in, how they can build a life, pay off student loans, connect to a community. There are ones who feel so angry, or isolated, or ashamed of themselves that they would take out their pain on others - with a gun - in Atlanta, in Boulder, in Virginia Beach. Please Lord, let this not be how we get back to normal.

We remember that Jesus was born into a time in history when everything was changing. God's people, centered in the story of salvation, the word of the prophets and the tradition of their ancestors, awaited the coming messiah - the one who would free them like Moses did; who would overturn the powers of the world, would bring peace and freedom for all, and set things right. This new king would ride in majesty, with power and authority, with strength to topple the powerful, and lift up those who had been oppressed and pushed aside. And here comes Jesus.

Let's just get it right out there. What's missing in this story? What did we not hear? That's right, there are no palm branches in this Palm Sunday story. In fact, John's

Gospel is the only one that specifically mentions palm branches. But let's not let that ruin our day together. Today we mark the beginning of Holy Week, and we enter into the story again, and we hear and worship and are mindful of the extent to which God would go to bring us in close once again, bringing us back to where we belong.

The palms remind us that this is a special day. But as Jesus approached Jerusalem, at least according to Luke, the people didn't need the palms. They stripped off their clothing - their cloaks were spread on the young colt and in the roadway, making a path for the anointed one to enter into David's royal city.

This was their new king.

They shout Hosanna! Save us!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace! Glory!

They recognize the savior has come. Those leaders, the Pharisees, with their important religious voices want the people to stop this. They'd prefer things to go back to the way they were. They are afraid and think the people should just stick to the plan, follow the rules, stop upsetting the powers that be, stop making so much noise. Jesus responds, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." This is not the time to be silent. And even if their voices were silenced, the whole creation would cry out. This is the visitation of God, the beginning of the next part of the salvation story. And God will not be prevented from saving, from appearing, from delivering on the promise.

He arrived as royalty, on an animal never ridden before. The people knew what they were seeing. They recognized that their hope was not in vain. This was a day for joy and for celebration. Those in power, the authorities who were invested in the status

quo and the power structure they helped to maintain, chose not to recognize the things that make for peace - to acknowledge the visitation of God in their midst.

Have you seen it?

We get so wrapped up in seeing what we are used to seeing, violence, hatred, despair, and inequality - that it might be difficult at times to recognize the visitation of God in our lives. We become distracted and detached, isolated and introspective. But we must remember that Christ's presence is here - in our hearts. Our whole lives are in Christ, just as they have always been. But we lose hope when so much is changing around us. We get afraid too.

What has not changed in our world is our need for peace, for justice, for saving. We long for it and await the one who will make us whole again. I pray that in this difficult season, this strange new century, this tumultuous and turbulent year, that we would recognize the need all around us, that we would recognize the need inside of each of us, that space where we need Jesus to enter in and bring healing. I pray that each of us would turn whatever deep longing is in us into a prayer, into action, into faithful participation in whatever brings peace for our neighbors.

What are some things that make for peace in our community?

My friend Kim in the neighborhood has partnered with local restaurants and cooks and serves over 100 meals a month to families and neighbors experiencing homelessness. The Just One project is feeding hundreds more each week, handing out boxes of food. LSSN has expanded and is hiring helpers to feed and serve those on the margins on the east side. Martin's Mart continues to serve here in the heart of the city and is in need of more volunteers. There are are peacemakers among us.

As we hear the story again this season we can also recognize that something is happening to us. Something old and yet something new. Now and always, Jesus is showing up - not hidden, but in plain sight, for us to see, to recognize. It requires us to pause from our routines and daily tasks and chores and to take notice. As we worship, we pause here to welcome him, to mark the occasion, and to wait in hopeful expectation of what Jesus will do once again. But it's not just today - it's not just in a church, it's in the world - it's every moment of every day. If you know the story, you know that this visitation from God is ongoing, and the Spirit of life that is given to each of us in baptism remains and carries us through this life together.

Recognize the good news - Christ has come, and Christ will come again. God's kindness and mercy that began with creation and liberation and continued in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus, remains with us, and you are filled and blessed and sent to live faithfully, knowing that you have been welcomed by the King of Glory. This week we'll remember the story of His death and be led in to the joy of the resurrection of the savior. Recognize that the love of Jesus remains with you and in you. There is still healing happening, in hospitals and homes, and in coffee shops and conversations between people who are struggling to find someone to listen, a friend to confide in, a person to love them as they deserve. Recognize the Spirit - there is new life beginning all around. There is forgiveness, and reconciliation in families and communities, there is growth and change and a vision for a future where all are included and fed and protected. Recognize Jesus is here. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Amen.