

"Holy Week: Culminating Victories By the Lord"

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

Holy Week: Palm Sunday Service

Rev. Kit Billings, M.Div, M.A.

April 10, 2022

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 50:4-9

Matthew 21:5-17

Hymns/Songs

"Hosanna, Loud Hosanna" 185

"All Glory, Laud and Honor"

"Ride On, Ride On in Majesty!" 207

Isaiah 50:4-9

⁴ The Lord God has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word
him who is weary.

Morning by morning he awakens;
he awakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.

⁵ The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I turned not backward.

⁶ I gave my back to those who strike,
and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;

I hid not my face
from disgrace and spitting.

⁷ But the Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like a flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

⁸ He who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?

Let us stand up together.

Who is my adversary?

Let him come near to me.

⁹ Behold, the Lord God helps me;
who will declare me guilty?

Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.

Matthew 21:5-17

⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion,

'Behold, your king is coming to you,

humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and He sat on them. ⁸Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹And the crowds that went before Him and that followed Him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” ¹⁰And when He entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” ¹¹And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹²And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”

¹⁴And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, ¹⁶and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read,

“‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise?’”

¹⁷And leaving them, He went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

Insight for Worship

Doctrine of the Lord, #17.2, 3 by Emanuel Swedenborg

The Lord did not take away sins by the passion of the cross; but...He takes them away, that is, removes them, in those who believe in Him by living according to His commandments....
...Sins cannot be taken away from a person except by actual repentance, which consists in seeing one’s sins, imploring the Lord’s help, and desisting from them.

SERMON: “Holy Week: Culminating Victories By the Lord”

Here we are my friends! The week above all weeks, as far as Christianity is concerned, **Holy Week**. Holy Week is by far the most riveting and powerful week that we honor and observe as Christians. Holy Week, of course, begins today with Palm Sunday and guides us through many very moving moments of healing and teaching that the Lord did, often while He was inside the Great Temple, all the while knowing that while He did His great work, His rival enemies within the Sanhedrin were fuming with anger and plotting how they would try to

destroy their greatest threat—who was Jesus of Nazareth. This sacred week culminates in the final hours of Christ’s natural life on Earth, when He instituted His Holy Supper, washed His disciples’ feet and then prayed with sweat and blood in Gethsemane just before He was arrested, then tried and condemned...spat upon and struck by angry fists, flogged by Roman soldiers and then crucified and murdered upon a cross.

Palm Sunday reveals for us several very important Divine truths for us to reflect upon: 1) it reminds us of how Jesus Himself understood His identity and His mission; 2) it reveals to us again the oceanic depths of the Lord’s Love and the unstoppable bravery it gave Him; and 3) it teaches us as the Lord’s modern-day disciples that He finished His most important task of all, which was His lifelong process of glorifying the natural humanness He received from His mother’s ancestry and making it Divine. Christ’s dogged and determined resolve to finish the final stage of His battle with Hell allowed Him to subjugate it, and bring it back into Divine control and governance.

Palm Sunday commemorates the Lord’s actions and final entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of His last week of life on Earth. Our reading in *Matthew 21* this morning takes us right into the thick of that great and momentous day, when Jesus rode into that famous city riding on the back of a donkey, the foal of a beast of burden. That action, which was a highly symbolic and ancient tradition He upheld, tells us a lot about the heart and mind of Jesus Christ. It stemmed from a verse in *Zecharia 9:9* that reads:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Two primary messages came from this well planned-for demonstration chosen by the Lord. First, it was Jesus’ confident yet totally peaceful way of telling the world and most of all His many enemies within the Jewish Sanhedrin, that He truly was their Divine and religious King! The highly oppressed peasants of Israel were desperate for a military strongman, another King David to lead them into war. But Jesus’ war was only with Hell, and that one He was sure to win. Only Jewish kings might choose to enter a city riding upon the back of a donkey, and **Jesus was in essence throwing a gauntlet down for the Scribes and Pharisees to witness.**

Both the Lord’s immense popularity and the great power of truth from His Divine Love were enormous threats to the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees had a life and death deal with the Romans and their Procurator Pontius Pilot, which stated that they had to retain control over their Jewish brethren, and if they failed and became unruly, they would be replaced by others who would keep the so called “peace” and order. So, as Christ’s popularity and sway over the people increased, giving them new hope and faith in God, the Pharisees

could feel a Roman noose tightening around their necks. In addition to this, the Pharisees were power hungry. They loved feeling like they had religious dominance over their peasant population, and they saw this deeply inspiring Jewish prophet from Nazareth who was now proclaiming Himself as their Messiah-King, as a gargantuan threat to their way of life. So for three years they plotted how to do away with Jesus for good. The Lord was fully aware, however, of their evil ways and intentions because since He was a boy he studied the writings of the Prophets and the Psalms. **Those writings made it clear that one day His life would end in suffering and death.** But Christ's focus was on Divine ends, and He knew that through it all He would gradually, day by day, face down and overcome every form and depth of inhuman evils, false ways of thinking and selfish ways of treating others. His mission was to show the people what true goodness and faith were really about, which gradually shed light upon the hypocrites within the Sanhedrin.

How young was Jesus when He first realized that His great work of redeeming humanity would end in His death? We don't really know. But at some early age He understood that His work was leading Him toward a final conflict that would conclude in His death. He knew, for example, *Isaiah 53:7* that reads: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." The Lord in fact told His disciples over and over that He would suffer and die, and that on the third day He would rise again in glory! He understood wisely that conflict was inevitable, because He knew that good and evil cannot live together in peace. **One or the other must govern.** The Pharisees could not allow for the Lord to continue His growing ministry, to continue doing what He was doing. They hated Him and what He taught, and they knew they could not prosper as long as Jesus was alive. Jesus' work threatened them constantly. For the Lord was not concerned with reputation and control as they were. Christ summed up His relationship with the Pharisees in His dialogue with Nicodemus (one of the few good Pharisees who enjoyed Christ's ministry in Palestine):

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

~John 3:19-21

The Lord came bringing the Light of Divine truth with Him, never to do harm to anyone, but to help people to know the truth and to love it so much that we freely choose to build our lives around it, as He had done. It is true that the Pharisees could ignore an average religious leader, but as long as Jesus performed miracles and continued to preach to large crowds, then anyone could know what He knew—yes, anyone, could begin to think and understand the truths of God and life from the Light the Lord lived in all the time. The commoners were learning what was good and true from Christ, and they began seeing the sham that the Pharisees were. In short, the Lord was revealing to the commoners that the Pharisees were fake, blind guides. They followed parts of the letter of the Law of Moses, but they constantly

broke its intent...and the Lord made this perfectly clear. In Christ's words they were like "...whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and all corruption." (Mtt. 23:27) He further shouted at them while inside the Holy Temple itself scolding them saying, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." Furthermore He shouted to them, "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. ¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves." (Mtt. 23:23, 13-15)

It was the Lord's very deep, passionate devotion to spiritual truth that inspired Him to disrupt the bad money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals on that first Palm Sunday, as He entered into the outer courts of Solomon's Holy Temple. And this was a slap upon the face of the Scribes and Pharisees who allowed their criminal workings to set up shop and thrive. Yes, as Christians we need to fully understand the workings of Holy Week, and that **still today our Lord brings upon us all His Light of truth, a light that exposes the enemy, those around us and those inside of us.**

We must be willing ourselves to stand in the Light of truth the Lord brings, which is not always comfortable to do. Imagine someone watching over your shoulder to see how you spend your time each day – watching each moment. **Do you feel comfortable with your priorities?** Would the observer encourage you in what you are doing and maybe even remind you to make time for your own spiritual growth? Or would you feel threatened by what that person would notice? **Would the light of objective observation defend or threaten your life?** Our Savior said, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness." (John 12:46) The Lord gave His listeners many other beautifully woven sayings and parables that week, including the Two Greatest Commandments and the Parable of the Ten Virgins, which is among my favorites. Poetically it makes it clear that throughout our lives the Lord gives us the ability to fill our spiritual lamps (our hearts) within us with the oil of His great Love, and to use it daily, which empowers us upon our deathbeds to hear the voice of the Lord our Bridegroom and follow Him into the feasts of love in Heaven.

In conclusion, underneath and deep within all of Christ's miracles and beautiful words of life, He continued His deepest work of redemption, which were culminating or "final stage" spiritual victories over the hellish forces that had been dominating Earth. But one great spiritual principle stands out for us who choose to listen to the Lord's story this morning about His triumphal entry into Jerusalem for His Holy Week. A king is the accepted ruler of a nation. In our lives the principle that we have accepted to rule our thoughts and conduct is our "king." Each one of us is given the choice of accepting the Lord as our "king of love," to rule within our minds and ways of life; or we can crown the principle of worldliness and self-interest as our ruler within. Holy Week reminds us that if we try to have two opposing "kings" or ruling principles inside of us, then it will be our spiritual principles that will be sacrificed or crucified, just as Jesus was back then.

We can either be one of the good Pharisees, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, or we can be like the rest of them, who figured out ways of doing away with what is good and true from God. The Lord went willingly to His crucifixion on that Friday because He knew that for one final time while on Earth, His great Love for all of humanity had to win out again over Hell's hatred and evil. And so, while dying in tremendous pain Jesus forgave those who killed Him, he told John His disciple to become His mother Mary's newly adopted son to take care of her, and He told a repentant murderer that later that day he would be with the Lord in paradise. And then in *John 19:30* we read: "When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, '**It is finished,**' and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

I will close by quoting our insight for worship today, quoted at the back portion of our bulletin. This is from our theological teachings that reads: "The Lord did not take away sins by the passion of the cross; but...He takes them away, that is, removes them, in those who believe in Him by living according to His commandments.... ..Sins cannot be taken away from a person except by actual repentance, which consists in seeing one's sins, imploring the Lord's help, and desisting from them." (*Doctrine of the Lord*, #17.2, 3 by Swedenborg)

May the Lord bless us all in our own struggles of Holy Week happening in our lives today. Thank you, Lord, for being our King of Divine truth, now and always! Amen.