

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings,
for 03.29.15 (Palm Sunday b)*

Day One: Zechariah 9:9-12

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey... As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free...

This prophecy foretells Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. By itself, it's not surprising that Zechariah, 500 years before Jesus was born, could describe his entrance into the city on a donkey. Any king might do the same. But Zechariah also called the coming Savior the "branch" who would rebuild and expand God's kingdom. He foretold that Jesus, the shepherd, would be sold for 30 pieces of silver.

All these details are interesting, but the most important point is that the one whom Zechariah announces is a king. "Rejoice... your king comes to you..." The nation which had not had a king for almost a century would now

have a king who would also be their high priest.

Considering that this prophecy is filled with war and bloodshed, that it predicts battle and death, and that the coming of a new king often means violence, why should we be so happy at a king's arrival? It depends on the king. And it depends on when and why he comes.

When Allied troops arrived in Germany at the end of World War II, they opened the camps and set free the prisoners of war. Imagine the joy of those prisoners. A conqueror's coming was a good thing.

The prophet calls the people "prisoners of hope". The coming of a king means that they are no longer in despair. How have you been a prisoner? And what is different in your life, since your victorious king has come to open the gates that shut you in?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, Thy kingdom come. Send us the King who will fulfill all our hopes, who will release all prisoners of sin, who will bring us alive out of death. Amen.*

Day Two: Philippians 2:5-11

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant... that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...

You know that Jesus was born in a stable. You know that his earthly parents weren't rich, and he grew up without any of the fine things you are used to having. You know that during his earthly ministry Jesus had "no place to lay his head." And of course you know that Jesus was arrested, beaten, unjustly condemned, tortured, and finally crucified.

But as Paul writes about Jesus' humility and his willingness to suffer for us, he says that Jesus "made himself nothing."

Nothing! That's a pretty drastic statement. Nothing? How can Paul say that? Jesus became one of us – are we nothing?

Paul is not saying that people are nothing, or that we have no value. But the sacrifice that Jesus made in humbling himself is far greater than any sacrifice you could

possibly make because he begins from such a different place.

Jesus begins at a very high place – equality with God the Father – and then humbles himself all the way down... down... down... to be like us.

Use your imagination. If you were to humble yourself that far, what would be left of your life? Jesus gave up his divinity – his heavenly eternal glory. You would have to give up your very humanity. What would you be? ...Nothing.

This is why we bow in church before the altar. It is because we realize that, even though Jesus is our good shepherd, yet he is exalted above all rulers in heaven and earth. We remember who he is... and who we are... and that every tongue, including ours, must confess "that Jesus Christ is Lord."

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you humbled yourself beneath even me. How is that possible? Now, Lord, teach me to humble myself, to recognize those ways in which I have raised myself up and to surrender them to you. Let me lift up your name above the heavens. Amen.*

Day Three

Gospel: John 12:12-19

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: ¹⁵ “Do not be afraid, Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.” At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.

It’s pretty easy to imagine getting in trouble for doing something that you didn’t realize you were doing. We worry about it all the time, that the speed limit might drop without our noticing and all of a sudden we’re stopped for speeding.

But is it also possible for us to do good things without meaning to? Can we bring great benefit by accident?

Jesus’ disciples glorified him on Palm Sunday without knowing they were fulfilling God’s plan. They wanted to sing Jesus’s praises and they didn’t even understand just how fitting that was! They were excited and praised him as a new king, but as cheerful as they were, Jesus was much more than even they had expected.

You could be fulfilling God’s plan without knowing it. We all want God’s plan in our life to be about some kind of personal success. But God’s most important plan is to bring the lost back to himself in faith. By living your unassuming life of faith, by your gifts, by your obedience, by your worship, how could God have used you in his plan without you knowing it?

“Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” Jesus’ words are so true. We do not know what we are doing. We understand so little, and our sins and mistakes cause so much misery. And yet, Jesus uses all these things to his glory and to our good.

If you know that Jesus wants to use you even before you know all the answers, how might you approach your life differently? Perhaps you would not wait to serve, you would not worry so much, and you would just joyfully give.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to see the eternal importance of all that I do. Take and use even the humblest tasks, those things I grumble about, and use them as you see fit. Amen.*

Day Four: John 12:19

So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

Do you fly an American flag on your house on Memorial Day or Independence Day? Not as many people do that anymore. At times it might even be controversial, taken as evidence of a political stance. Flying a flag of any kind is a statement that some people will like, and others will find offensive. The same was true of the palm branches that people waved as Jesus came to Jerusalem. These were, symbolically, like a flag of the Israelite nation at the time.

In the same way, "Hosanna in the highest" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" were clearly political things to shout. They were tributes to Jesus as an earthly king, and naturally some people were offended.

I examined dozens of different Palm Sunday paintings, drawings, and stained glass windows. Almost none of them bothered to show Jesus' opposition. But there is no crowd, then or

now, in which there are none who disagree, none who harbor reservations about this Savior.

Even on Palm Sunday, when we sing Hosanna in the church, not everyone present will mean what they say. And even in a large and joy filled church, when the organ is loud and everyone seems to be singing, there will still be hearts that are closed to Jesus, and spirits that do not want him to rule their lives.

For all of these, Jesus came to Jerusalem. For them he died, not just for his "supporters" or people of his own "party." Jesus desired not only to be king, but to be our Savior, to take our place in death. Jesus loves those who do not love him. Is this you?

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, even in my own heart I have harbored doubts. But there was no doubt or hesitation in yours. You loved me completely. Help me to love you more. Amen.*

These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship at stpaulannarbor.org