

Palm Sunday 2021
Psalm 31:9-16 B

BE GRACIOUS TO ME, O LORD, FOR I AM IN DISTRESS...RESCUE ME FROM THE HAND OF MY ENEMIES AND MY PERSECUTORS! MAKE YOUR FACE SHINE ON YOUR SERVANT; SAVE ME IN YOUR STEADFAST LOVE!

Ah, Palm Sunday. You've seen the artwork of Jesus riding in to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Most of the pictures are the same. There's Jesus – He's riding on the donkey, His head held high, His shoulders back. He's smiling. The crowd, their mouths are opened wide, with the words, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel," flowing out of them (Jn 12:13). They are waving their palm branches, welcoming Jesus. But, look at their faces. Take a good, long look at their faces, and what do you see? There are a few that are smiling; but most of them are not smiling.

There are not a lot of smiles on Palm Sunday. You look at them, and you just have to wonder, why are they like that? Why are they so gloomy? These people look like their bodies and their souls are weighed down by grief. People that have been left for dead. They look like broken vessels. It's like you just want to say to them, "What's going on? Why do you look so gloomy? What is the problem?"

You really don't have to say that to them, because, deep down, you're one of them. And so, you know why they're so gloomy. You look at those people and it says something about yourself.

Looking at them brings thoughts into your mind like this: I am a follower of Jesus. But, this whole loving God and loving neighbor thing; honestly, I'm not very good at it. And it shows all the time in my life. I am supposed to fear, love, and trust in God, but I find myself worried, stressed

out so often. I know I'm supposed to believe the promises of God's Word – especially that part about Jesus being with us always and all things working together for good -- but sometimes, most often in fact, I feel alone and like my life is just spinning out of control. I know I'm supposed to obey and cherish those in authority over us, but politicians today seem to be nothing but a bunch of selfish, self-absorbed hypocrites. I know I'm supposed to forgive my neighbor, even that one who hurt me so bad, but it just feels good to stay angry. I know I'm supposed to love and honor my spouse, but I just have to honestly think of how much better my life would be if only I was married to her/him. I know I'm supposed to speak well of my neighbor, but that is a hard thing to do, especially when I just plain don't care for them very much. I know I'm not supposed to be jealous, but when am I finally going to get mine?

So, why am I gloomy? Why am I not smiling? Because of my iniquity. I am weighed down by the shame and guilt that I carry around in my body and soul. I am weighed down by griefs, sorrows. I'm like a broken vessel – hammered again and again, until its in 1,000 pieces. I feel like one forgotten, like one who is dead. I don't feel like smiling.

But, the Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ doesn't leave you in your sin so that you can feel all gloomy. Lift up your head and look. What do you see on Palm Sunday? You see the Holy One of God riding into Jerusalem to save you from all your sins and iniquities, so that you can say,

Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."
My times are in your hand;

rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!
Make your face shine on your servant;
save me in your steadfast love!

The graciousness, the rescue, the steadfast love of God. You want it. You need it.

And, that's what God gives you as His only-begotten Son rides on a donkey, a beast of burden. The Holy One of God is carrying a burden, the sin of all the world. "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all," the Bible says (Is 53:6).

When He gets to Jerusalem, Judas, for 30 pieces of silver, betrays Him into the hands of the chief priests, scribes, and the Pharisees in the Garden of Gethsemane. They are just sick and tired of Him, so they decided He had to die. They condemn Him to death in a kangaroo court. They send Him to Pilate to be sentenced to death, and He is. So, off He goes to Golgotha. Look at Him there -- nailed to the cross; stricken, smitten and afflicted, dying on the tree -- bearing your sin, your shame, your guilt, your griefs, your sorrows. He is a broken vessel, one left for dead, as he bleeds and as He dies.

Look at that cross -- and what do you see? You see God's graciousness for you. You see God's rescue of you. You see God's steadfast love for you, in the flesh. The Holy One of God cries, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit," as He dies for you, as the payment for your sins, so you, Dear Child of God, are forgiven.

But that's not the end of the story. For on Easter morning, you see God's graciousness for you in your distress; His rescue; His steadfast love as Jesus rises from the dead, to bring you forgiveness, life, and salvation;

to bring you God's graciousness, rescue, and steadfast love. And, He does it through His Word and Sacraments.

Remember your Baptism and the gifts God has given you in the water and the Word. You are God's own child, redeemed by Christ the crucified. Never will God leave you, nor forsake you. Be comforted that God has plans for you, plans to prosper you, not harm you; plans to give you hope and the glorious future of heaven.

Remember and cherish the words of the Psalm, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105)."

Come to the Lord's Table to eat our Lord's Body and drink His blood. Come, and taste the goodness of God, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. There, at the Lord's Table, you will taste the Lord's graciousness, rescue, and steadfast love for you.

I call this to your attention, Dear Friends in Christ, because Satan often uses the sorrows, toils, and ills of this world to lead us to despair. Use these means of grace, these means that God Himself has chosen, to give His graciousness, rescue, and steadfast love to you, that you may always, no matter the darkness around you, have the joy of Jesus and a smile on your face.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.