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Lent 6 – Zechariah 9:9-10 – Ride On

3/28/21 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

Isn't that an awesome song? *Ride On, Ride On in Majesty* – it gets your heart beating a little bit faster, almost like you're seeing Jesus coming down the road right toward you. It gets you singing a little louder, almost like you were there at that first Palm Sunday praising Jesus' name in person. And without question he deserves every bit of it, because what you see on Palm Sunday is real glory and true majesty.

But yet it just seems so meek, doesn't it? I mean, take in the whole scene here: Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey, not some great warhorse like you might expect – and one he had to borrow no less and give back right away afterwards. He rode in with cloaks for a saddle, no fine leather or anything gold or jewel-encrusted. He came wearing no crowns or purple robes – those would have to wait till the following Friday. And he came along with no bright lights on no red carpet, but rather trampling down palm branches in his path to the sneers of the Jewish religious leaders who witnessed it.

In majesty and meekness comes God's true Messiah, with both hosannas and harangues hurled his way. Though the world may not see it, though his enemies will never understand it, yet today we joyfully join to sing, "*Ride on, ride on in majesty! Hark! all the tribes hosanna cry. O Savior meek, pursue your road, With palms and scattered garments strowed.*" Ride on, we say – in humility, in righteousness, and with peace and salvation, because that's the kind of Messiah we need not just for here and now, but for eternity.

But you know, this scene didn't come out of nowhere, and it's no surprise Jesus gained such a following as he brought it to life on that first Palm Sunday. Actually the prophet Zechariah foretold that this would happen some 550 years earlier. Hear those words again: "*Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*" Make no mistake about it, the one riding through Jerusalem that day was a king – but not just any king. In fact, he was a completely different king than

any that had come before or after him. He was a king who didn't care about earthly crowns and worldly accolades. He was a king who didn't care about castles and borders and every other vain glory that goes along with kings who eventually die and kingdoms that eventually fall. No this king came gentle, humble, lowly, and familiar with suffering.

He was a king who didn't stand out above his people below, but rather a king who bowed low so that he could raise us up. He rode on a donkey, a regular old working animal, and he wore the normal clothes he lived and worked in because he still had work to do for which he would have to get down and dirty. This king wasn't going to the palace; no, he was going to the cross to inaugurate a kingdom so much greater than this world could ever know.

It's just like the hymn says: "*Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die. O Christ, your triumphs now begin O'er captive death and conquered sin.*" See, Jesus had to be humble and gentle so he could be our Savior. He had to be meek and lowly because he needed to be our perfect substitute who could walk in our shoes. He had to be willing to suffer because there was no other way to triumph over sin and death forever. By his sinless life, he conquered sin for us. By his sacrificial death, he destroyed death for us. And even still now through his humble, gentle Word and through his lowly sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, he comes to us to reign not in great worldly majesty but in a way that is truly greater – in meekness, in our hearts and lives with the Gospel message of sins forgiven, death defeated, and heaven won.

In a world that is so often so wrong, this king is everything right. He did what was right *on behalf* of his people by humbly, willingly, faithfully carrying out his Father's plan for our salvation, and then when he reigns, he does what is right *for* his people by working out everything for our spiritual and eternal good. That's what it means for this king to come to you in righteousness – I mean, where can you find that in a worldly government? In a political scene that so often at least makes you wonder, there's no doubt that this king always does what is best for us – even if it means laying down his life to make sure of it. And so we sing, "*Ride on, ride on in majesty! The angel armies of the sky Look down with sad and wond'ring eyes To see th' approaching sacrifice.*"

See, it's not just this world that's so often so wrong. It's us too. From our selfish attitudes to our spiritual sluggishness to our disrespect of anyone or anything that would tell us what to do or actually point out our wrongs, every hoof print on that road into Jerusalem for Jesus represented the determination to make us right again like we were always supposed to be. Yes, it is sad, it's terribly sad what Jesus had to go through because of us. But yet how wonderful it is to see our Savior's love for us! What could be more right than God fighting to win back his people for eternity, the way it was always meant to be? It was so wrong but yet at the same time so right that on the day when the Passover lamb was traditionally chosen and set apart for sacrifice, so also our Savior presented himself in full view of Jerusalem as the true Lamb of God who was specially chosen to be the perfect sacrifice that would take away the sin of the world.

And one day the righteousness of Jesus' cause will be clear for everyone to see. But until that day, just like on that first Palm Sunday, the majesty of Jesus' reign will stay hidden just beneath the surface – to be seen only with the eyes of faith. No, Jesus might not have seemed very kingly as the world looked at him that day. But the victory he won for his people and the throne that he rode on to take makes him the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and the ruler of heaven and earth, just like the hymn says: *“Ride on, ride on in majesty! Your last and fiercest strife is nigh. The Father on his sapphire throne Awaits his own anointed Son.”*

This king doesn't come with a sword or battle bow; in fact, he comes to break and defeat them both. He comes not with tyranny and delusions of grandeur and empire; rather, he comes having salvation and proclaiming peace to the nations. But this salvation he brings isn't just talk and this peace he proclaims isn't just a nice thought. No, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he rode in to do battle with the devil and all the forces of evil – with us and our eternal welfare hanging in the balance. But what looked to all the world like a tragic loss on Good Friday became a triumphant victory on Easter Sunday when God the Father delivered his Son from death, declared his work completed and his enemies defeated, and for Jesus' sake shared that deliverance with us. And that's why on this day, even before Jesus faced his last and fiercest strife, he held this victory parade with palm branches waving

in love and thanks and praise, because there was no way the Lord's anointed Savior was going to fail to deliver to us all the eternal blessings he promised us.

Yes, the salvation Jesus won on Holy Week brings us a peace greater than anything this world can give, and it makes Jesus a greater King than this world could ever offer. As the prophet Zechariah said, *“I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.”*

Jesus' kingdom isn't founded on bloodshed like so many others in our world's history – or at least not in the same way. This king doesn't shed the blood of others to conquer lands. This king shed his own blood to conquer souls for salvation and eternal life in his heavenly kingdom. No, that's not how an earthly kingdom works. But it is how a *spiritual* kingdom works, and though not of this world, it would overcome this world for our sake. With no other weapon than the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus set out to conquer creation and make it his own, and now he calls us to be his witnesses who carry that standard to the ends of the earth – not by force of arms but with the peace and gentleness of the Gospel, just like Jesus.

Yes truly, Palm Sunday is a tremendous paradox – such great meekness, and yet such awesome majesty. It's such a contrast between the humility of our Savior's earthly life and death and the glory that rightly belongs to him as our eternal Savior-King. He comes to do battle, but yet he comes to bring peace. Two purposes that seem completely contradictory – even as contradictory as the beams on the cross that he rode on to take. Only there can you see his deepest meekness; only there can you see his truest majesty; and only there can you see the full extent of his love and salvation and peace, won for you. And so with Christians across the world and across the ages we join to sing, *“Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die. Bow your meek head to mortal pain, Then take, O Christ, your power and reign.”* Amen.