

Sermon for Palm & Passion Sunday, 1.iv.2007
Saint James the Apostle Evangelical Lutheran Church / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Luke 19:28-40, Isaiah 50:4-9a, Psalm 31:9-16, Philippians 2:5-11
The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Saint Luke 22:14—23:56
10:00 a.m., Holy Communion – LBW Setting 2

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who
was and Who is to come. ☩ Amen.

As He was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying: "Blessed is the King Who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him: "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered: "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

--Luke 19:37-40

Christ Our Lord is supremely confident as He responds to His critics. Who would not be at the head of such a throng? We are blessed to be living in a time in which the events of the day and the courage of television journalists in some very dangerous places

gives us access to scenes very much the pilgrims' parade that troubled the Pharisees and worried the Romans on that first Palm Sunday.

Perhaps you saw as I did the documentary aired recently on PBS which followed several Shiite Muslims from Iran, all of them from different walks of life, on their dangerous pilgrimage to Karbala in Iraq. Karbala is the place of martyrdom of Imam Hussein and the pilgrims who accompanied him to another Shiite holy site. That event took place nearly a thousand years ago, but it was for these pilgrims just as though they were entering into the events of that time. They did so with prayer and fasting, with tears for the martyred Imam Hussein, with songs of joy welcoming One they call the Hidden Imam, their Messiah. They

made their pilgrimage by overcoming their fear of traveling into a country under foreign occupation in the midst of civil war, overcoming their fear of being martyred themselves by Sunni terrorists, and the men and women respectively rejoiced with each other as they had completed their pilgrimage.

There was something beautiful for them in Karbala—apart from the shrine itself, one of the most abysmally poor and wretched looking places on earth. Looking at the place to which no Iranian could travel until the fall of Saddam Hussein, one of them described it to his wife back home in Tehran by cell phone as 'paradise on earth.' Faith enabled him to see paradise, a place to be in the presence of God, where I could see only slums and people who must

live very hard lives indeed, lives made harder by war. The celebration of the pilgrims was ecstatic. I began to feel happy for them and even to be caught up in the joy they were experiencing, as you did perhaps, that is until they began chanting the slogan 'Death to evil America and Britain! Death to the Zionists!' over and over again, but with smiles on their faces.

The disciples of Jesus, had He given a single nod, had He even implied His permission to hate with a single word, could certainly have chanted slogans in addition to "Blessed is the King Who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" But He did *not* give the slightest indication that it would be alright to shout 'Death to the evil Romans and Herodians!' Neither

hatred nor violence were in His arsenal as He began His frontal assault against the evil without which there would be no evil men, against the fear of death and the fear of the other without which there would be no violence, His siege against sin, death and the devil, that unholy trinity which keeps the heart and mind of man in bondage.

But what weapons and what force would He use in this week of His Passion, this Holy Week in which we are called to walk with Him every hour of every day? By contrast with our country's most recent attempt at war with the forces of evil, a war we have tried to fight with as few troops, as lightly equipped as possible, so as not to raise taxes, the force *He* used was *overwhelming*, and it was *costly, costly*

in the extreme. He would have nothing left, as the ancient Christ-hymn tells the story in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians, "having *emptied Himself.*" It would cost Him His life. He would have not second wave of attack prepared, because none would be necessary. All that would be required after the final battle on Good Friday would be a mopping up operation entrusted to His Church until He comes again to deal with the last pockets of resistance.

His weapons were no secret, and they were anything but destructive. They were part of the counsel of God from the beginning, spoken as commandments, as mandates for running the world and our lives in it. His weapon was *truth and purity of heart,* truth under cross-examination and bullying from

those who mocked the very word, purity of heart that speaks only what is true, truth that refuses to dignify with an answer the mocking questions those mad with power. His weapon was *enduring courage*, bearing up under the worst of trials, confident in God's faithfulness. His weapon was *forgiveness*, spoken directly to the enemy in charge of His execution, the most powerful of words that turned that enemy into a friend and that, within only a few generations, would turn that evil empire and the whole world upside down.

He did all of this so that we could and can be free from evil and death. He did all this showing us the way that freedom is achieved. He did all this without hate, without wishing death on a

single soul. Come, enter into this week to be with Him, as Christians are doing all over the world. Come, enter into His battle and into His victory in *this* place, in this church. It is not the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, but it is *your* Church and it is *the* Church for this congregation. No one will plant a roadside bomb or throw a hand grenade or fire an RPG or drive a car bomb into you as you attempt to come here. If you do not come, it will be because you have decided not to come, not to enter Holy Week together. To those who have decided to separate themselves from the Church in this place, for whatever reason or lack of reason, I say to them also, *come to walk with Him!* Come to this place, and let nothing and no one hold you back, where even the stones of

this house's foundation and the stones of memory bearing the names of the saints who have gone before us cry out, "Blessed is the King Who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who has made of us a Kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever. ✠ Amen.

