

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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April 9, 2006
Palm Sunday
Psalm 24
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Zechariah 9:9,10
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 24
Second Lesson: Philippians 2:5-11
Gospel: Mark 11:1-10

Welcome the King!

How do you welcome someone you are excited to see? You guys today (the confirmation class), if you have people coming from far away that you haven't seen in awhile for a get together, how do you welcome them? Do you see them coming and run away and hide in the other room or something so that you don't have to talk to them? What do you do to welcome them? Do you go up and shake their hand or maybe throw your arms around them and give them a hug? Maybe you talk about things that you haven't talked about in quite awhile because you haven't seen them. When you are excited to see someone, you are going to welcome them in probably a different way than you greet your teacher every morning, right?

As we come together on Palm Sunday, we see the people in Jerusalem and how they welcomed the King that was prophesied in Zechariah and in Psalm 24. We see them welcome him with shouts of acclamation, shouts of joy, and shouts of thanksgiving. But on your confirmation day today, we also talk about how you are going to welcome your King. It is not just a one-time thing or a one-day thing where you get prettied up and put on a white gown. But how do you welcome and keep on welcoming your King every day for the rest of your life? That is what we want to think a little bit about today, because that is something that all of us, as Christians, want to do. We want to welcome our King, not just once, but continually, ongoing.

As we look at the words of Psalm 24 this morning, we see we welcome our King with *clean hands and a pure heart*, but then also with joy and with excitement because our King comes to us—not as a judge—but as our Savior.

Welcome the King. It starts out in Psalm 24 though talking about God as the creator of all things, right? *The earth is the LORD'S and everything in it, the world and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.* Then it seems to go off in a different direction about ascending the hill of the LORD and about urging the gates to lift up their heads so that they could welcome the coming King. Why this reminder about God being the creator of all things? The truth is that it is just like at that time, people tend to segment God. In those days they did it by saying that God was just a God of a local area. But Yahweh, the Lord, was claiming to be God over all things because he had created all things, which set him apart from all the other so-called gods of that day.

But think about how it is for you and me and think about how it is tempting for you guys (the confirmation class). We tend to think that God is God when we have our nice

clothes on and we are sitting in his house. Or maybe God is God over all things when we are studying his Word. But then sometimes, and maybe you guys have never done this, I don't know, you run out in the playground and you act as though you never heard of God. And as you talk to one another, treat one another, pick on one another and all things like that, sometimes we are inclined to think that God isn't the God of all places and all times, but that we want to just pigeon-hole him in our little area where we think he belongs. Then once we walk out of those doors that are his house, he doesn't apply to us anymore. We can say and do whatever we want and if he doesn't like it, that's tough. That is why we don't have clean hands and a pure heart. That is why we need God to give us what we don't have. We aren't fit to enter the house of the Lord. We aren't fit to ascend the hill of the Lord. We aren't fit to stand in his holy place. His holy place means "pure", without any stain, without any blemish.

Think of how blemished you and I are. Think of how often we say and do things that go exactly against what our God says to say and to do. Think of how often our Lord says to love him above all things and we say we will except this, this and this. We might not say it, but we sure live it at times. We sure chase after other things as though they are more important than God. We sure cave in to pressure that comes from other people because we don't want to look out of touch. So we let God become less than God in our own lives. When God demands of you and I pure hands and a clean heart, I don't care how white your gowns are today, you are not pure and you are not clean. Don't let anyone kid you and tell you otherwise—not by yourself at least, right? What makes you pure and clean and what makes all of us pure and clean is that what God demands of you and me, God gives to you and me.

In a sense you first put on a white gown or a gown of the sort when you guys were baptized. You put on the robe of Christ's righteousness. So what God demanded of you—clean hands and a pure heart—God gave to you when he washed away your sins when you were baptized into Christ Jesus. Then for however many years since that took place, you have been growing in Christ Jesus and learning who he is and what he has done. How the Father sent him. How the Spirit works faith in our hearts to believe that what Jesus did for the world he did for us individually. So what God has demanded of you—clean hands and a pure heart—he has given to you. You have grown in that knowledge as you have studied the Word. So now you are ready to approach his altar to receive his body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. And knowing how desperate you need that forgiveness and knowing just what he is giving to you. He gives to you what he demands of you.

It is unlike anything else that you and I experience in the world, isn't it? What is it—a week and a day when we have to send in our taxes, right? What the government demands of us as a privilege of being a citizen of this country. Can you imagine if the government would say, "This is the amount that you owe," and then they would cut the check for you and pay your taxes for you? It is unthinkable, isn't it? That's what our God has done. Our God has said you need to be holy. We can't be holy. We are not holy. We never can be holy. And yet, we have been vindicated by our Savior. Our Savior has provided us the righteousness God demands. That is why you and I want to receive our King and welcome him and keep on welcoming him with joy and with excitement because what is coming to us is more precious and more important than

anything else in the world. You guys have learned that, right? You have lifted up your heads to greet the coming King as you have studied his Word. And the Spirit has come to you through that Word and he has made you understand a little bit more now than he did the day of your baptism, I'm assuming, right?

You have learned to know him better and better because you have welcomed him because after the Spirit works faith in your heart—like we talked about last week—you cooperate with the Holy Spirit—not in that you make yourself grow—but that you make use of the Word and the Sacraments so that you grow in that faith.

Think of what that Psalm is talking about—*Lift up your heads, O you gates*—gates don't have heads, right? The city walls weren't going to lift up their heads, but the city walls were to know that something important was coming. We were to know that someone important was coming. That was the Savior who came in on Palm Sunday. He came through the city gates and entered into Jerusalem so that he could suffer and die for our sins. He comes to you every time you make use of the Word. He comes to you in the Lord's Supper today. He comes to you to say, "I love you and I have loved you intensely and I always will love you intensely because I have taken away your sins."

We have talked about this in class. Don't get the idea that now that you have the gown and the flower that once you take it off you are done with that and you don't need to keep welcoming your Lord, that you don't need to keep lifting up your heads to look for him and receive him with joy and excitement because now it is done and now you can move onto other stuff. Don't fall into Satan's trap that God's Word and study of it is kid's stuff because there is a lot you don't know about God's Word yet, right? Remember I asked you what is in Nahum and you all looked at me like I was speaking Greek again? There is a lot in there that you don't know. There is a lot in there that I don't know yet and that I need to keep studying. There is a lot in God's Word that all of us can keep growing and learning and the more we grow and learn, the more we lift up our heads and look to our God, the more peace we will have in our life, the more confidence we will have in our life, the more contentment we will have in our life. We will have blessing upon blessing from our God because he will strengthen us and help us to look at things with his eyes—putting things in the proper perspective as he has them ranked, not falling into the world's lies about what is important is just possessions. But recognizing that some of the most important things the Lord has given you, besides the knowledge of his Son, are the Christian friends that you make, and the Christian friends that are now going to be your fellow communicant members in this congregation. You have a responsibility now to help us lift up our heads so that we grow in grace and knowledge. And we have a responsibility to help you. God puts us together so that together we can continually welcome the King, rejoice in our salvation and live, not out of "have to's", live not out of fear that God is going to come and get us if we do something wrong, because God has already come and punished Christ. You and I know that, but you and I now want to live because we "get to" live for God. We want to live for God.

It is a joy to serve God. It is a joy to get to know him more and more and love him more intensely. Don't let the joy of this day fade away. Let it be the start, a building block of the foundation that you have laid that you continue to build on. And for all of you that have stood before God's altar before and said that you would rather die than fall away

from the Lord, use this day as a reminder of how important it is for you to keep welcoming the King and to rejoice in the knowledge that he has taken away your sins and to know that he loves you with this intense of a love. Let the joy of Christ build that excitement in your heart, because we have a God that is like no other.