

# "Palm Sunday – The Epic Miscalculation"

Text: Philippians 2:5-11

May the love of God the Father fill you with wonder; may the sacrifice of God the Son fill you with gratitude and confidence; and may the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit fill you with faith, hope, and love. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

There is an old Chinese proverb that says: *"He who rides a tiger is afraid to dismount."* The same idea has been condensed and modified in our culture by describing someone *"having a tiger by the tail."* The general meaning is the same: human beings miscalculate, they get themselves into impossible situations, and the results are often catastrophic.

In 1628 the Swedish Navy launched what many at the time regarded as the most powerful warship ever built. It capsized almost immediately on its maiden voyage, killing all on board. It wasn't until recently that the wreck was recovered and the problem discovered. The ship was dramatically thicker and heavier on the port side than on the starboard side. The anomaly baffled experts until archeologists recovered measuring sticks used in the ship's construction. What they found was that craftsman on one side of the ship were basing their measurements on an Amsterdam foot, which was 11 inches long, while craftsmen on the other side were using the Swedish foot, which was 12 inches long. Oops.

Not to be outdone, a NASA orbiter crashed into Mars in 1999, resulting in a \$300M loss and public embarrassment. After an investigation it was discovered that while NASA used metric Newton-seconds in its calculations, the contractor (Lockheed Martin) used imperial pound-seconds. Again, oops.

History is full of examples of epic miscalculations. The builders of the Titanic didn't equip the ship with enough lifeboats for all on board because, of course, the Titanic would never sink anyway. Hitler didn't equip his divisions with winter gear when it invaded the Soviet Union because, of course, the country would fall long before the onset of winter. The French state-owned railway company constructed 2,000 new trains for its new railway system before it discovered that they were too wide to enter the majority of its railroad terminals.

None of these, however, comes close to the epic miscalculation of the players in the event we commemorate this morning – Palm Sunday. The text that will guide our study of this event, which will also reveal the

catastrophic consequences of that epic miscalculation, is found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Paul's Letter to the Philippians:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Philippians 2:5-11** *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

These are the inspired words of our God, graciously recorded and preserved for mankind down through the ages to this very moment. That you and I might gain the full benefit that our God intended for us through the study of these words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

During the three years of his earthly ministry, Jesus was meticulously careful to avoid saying anything that his enemies could use to condemn him. This was a master calculation on his part. He gave witness to who and what he was, but always he couched his words in symbols, pictures, parables, all of which spoke the truth while providing no firm grounds for condemnation. So it was that he referred to himself as the **"Son of Man"** rather than the Son of God; as the **"Light that is to come into the world"** but never as the "Promised Messiah," as one who would, if the temple were destroyed, **"rebuild it in three days."** Even when *others* made clear, public, and unambiguous statements of his divinity, he reprimanded them and told them to remain silent until the proper time. The result was prolonged frustration for his enemies, and the extension of his earthly ministry.

On Palm Sunday we see more of the Master at work. On Palm Sunday he *purposefully*, for example, chose to enter Jerusalem riding on **"a colt, the foal of a donkey."** The import of this decision, this action, was certainly not lost on his Jewish enemies. They were experts in the Old Testament prophecies and knew full well that which was spoken by the Prophet Zechariah: **"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."** The Jews knew full well that in entering Jerusalem

according to the Old Testament prophecy, Jesus was wordlessly declaring himself to be Israel's Promised Messiah. This fact was further emphasized when he refused their demand to quiet the crowds as they sung his praises. Yet with what could the Jews charge him in any of this? Could they condemn him to death for riding into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey? Could they condemn him for what others said about him? Behold the Master at work, conveying the message of who and what he was while continuing to frustrate his enemies who sought in vain for evidence against him – evidence that only he himself would provide at the time he himself had determined. He still had work to do from Sunday through Thursday, not the least of which was the institution of the Lord's Supper.

Yet the fact remains that with this sort of entry the die was indeed cast. From Palm Sunday on there would be no turning back. The inevitable *confrontation* had finally come. The last and greatest of God's messengers to Jerusalem had entered Jerusalem, and he came knowing full well that what had been done to all the prophets that preceded him would also be done to him. He entered Jerusalem to die.

This is the event we celebrate this morning, known simply today as Palm Sunday. We today recognize the event as the beginning of Holy Week. The final, terrible battle between the Son of God and his mortal enemies was to be joined in David's City.

The particular aspect of this event that we study this morning is the fact that virtually every player in that historical event believed that by entering Jerusalem Jesus was making a profoundly foolish mistake – an epic miscalculation. Everyone, that is, except for Jesus.

Jesus entered Jerusalem knowing without a doubt that by doing so there was no turning back. Jesus had no doubt whatsoever exactly what the outcome would be. He went to Jerusalem, in fact, because he *did* know *exactly* what the outcome would be. ***"It was,"*** as he himself said, ***"for this cause that he came into the world."***

The disciples certainly thought this was a mistake. They told Jesus as much. Yet it is certainly an interesting side note here to give some thought to just what the disciples must have been thinking when the crowds greeted Jesus as they did. While *Jesus* knew the outcome, his men did not. That is not to say that Jesus hadn't clearly told them. He had. It would, nonetheless, have been humanly impossible for them not to be carried away in the moment – hoping against hope that perhaps their fears would not be realized and that Jesus could instead, against all odds, somehow

avoid death and instead establish that kingdom on earth for which they longed.

Their resistance to Jesus' plan, you will recall, was based on their flawed ideas concerning Jesus' mission. In their minds, to die was to lose. Success, in their minds, would have meant defeating his enemies and establishing his own government.

No doubt the crowds were also carried away by the moment. I have no doubt that they too thought Jesus was making a mistake coming to Jerusalem, but they too seem to have been caught up in the spectacle of his triumphal entry. Jesus was not fooled by the very temporary reaction of the crowds. He rode to fulfill his loving, humble mission, as we heard in our text: ***"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*** He had come to die for the sins of the world, and he knew that that was exactly what was going to happen.

This realization undoubtedly escaped everyone else – friends and enemies alike. While the reaction of the crowds undoubtedly buoyed the spirits of the disciples, it undoubtedly filled Jesus' enemies with a sense of foreboding. Surely they must have imagined that as soon as Jesus entered their power center, he would be at their mercy. The reaction of the crowd was therefore both alarming and disconcerting. Maybe this wasn't going to be as easy as they had hoped.

They needn't have worried. Amazingly enough, Jesus' plan was identical to their own. In fighting against Jesus, they were actually accomplishing his goal. So it was that while Satan plotted his last, best hope for causing Jesus to sin and therefore fail, which was the horrible torture and execution by crucifixion, he actually thereby plotted his own failure. Many would argue that Satan's plan represented the greatest of all miscalculations here. In plotting Jesus' death, he was also thereby enabling Jesus' own plan for the rescue and salvation of mankind. The fact is Satan undoubtedly recognized that he had run out of options. Insanity is often defined as "doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting different results." The devil is evil, not insane. He had tried unsuccessfully for thirty three years to get Jesus to sin. Not only had that not worked, there was no reason to believe that it would in the future. He clearly then recognized that he had one last chance to destroy Jesus. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus would finally break under the pressure that the forces of evil would bring to bear in connection with his abandonment, trial, and crucifixion. His reasoning could well have been, ***"Nothing else has worked. This is our last best hope."***

In the end the devil too fell victim to his own epic miscalculation – as did everyone else that opposed our Savior. In fact a brief survey of the cast of characters that opposed Jesus leaves no doubt whatsoever as to the final outcome for all who practice such miscalculated opposition to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Satan wasn't the only member of that Palm Sunday crowd that came to devastating ruin. Every single one of Jesus' enemies failed, most of them quite horribly.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor that ultimately sentenced to death a man that he knew to be innocent? He went on to carry out other atrocities until he was finally recalled by Rome after slaughtering thousands of Samaritan pilgrims. Under the Roman Emperor Caligula, Pilate was sent into exile where he committed suicide in about 38 AD, a tortured, embittered, broken man.

Herod, who treated Jesus so shamefully and who also refused to declare his innocence? He was later struck down by God himself and died a horrible death, "***eaten by worms.***"

Judas, of course, tried in vain to make up for the evil he had wrought, eventually hanging himself in utter despair and unbelief.

The Jewish rulers, those who sought to preserve their own power by killing Jesus and who foolishly cried out, "***His blood be on us and on our children!***" - the Romans gave them their wish. The legions of Rome under Titus laid siege to Jerusalem and laid waste to their city and temple in 70 AD. The Jews sacrificed Jesus in a vain attempt to preserve their own power, and in so doing they themselves caused exactly what they tried so diabolically to avoid. Truly an epic miscalculation.

In fact it is absolutely chilling to realize that *none* of Jesus' tormenters escaped God's wrath – not in this world, and certainly not in the world to come. This is critical news our old Adams needs to hear: *All who oppose God and reject his Son will fail, and that epic miscalculation carries eternal consequences.* Our text put it this way: "***At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***" On the other hand, our text also describes the results of Jesus' victory on the cross: "***Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.***"

That is then what you and I should take from this day – both the law and the gospel. Jesus' enemies always fail; his allies always win. What we also

therefore take from this day is the fact that as Jesus entered Jerusalem to the cheers of a few, one day he will return to the deafening jubilation of all of the elect. Though once he came "***poor and lowly,***" the next time he will come "***on the clouds with power and great glory.***" He himself has promised it, which makes it an absolute certainty. On that day his holy angels, now unseen, will attend him, and the sights and sounds and joy of that great day simply transcend our present mortal comprehension. God preserve us in our Christian faith that you and I might join that great assembly at his reappearing. Amen.

## **Scripture Readings**

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 50:4-9** The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. <sup>5</sup> The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. <sup>6</sup> I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. <sup>7</sup> But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. <sup>8</sup> He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. <sup>9</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 12:31-41** Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. <sup>34</sup> So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" <sup>35</sup> So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. <sup>36</sup> ¶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. <sup>37</sup> Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, <sup>38</sup> so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" <sup>39</sup> Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, <sup>40</sup> "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them." <sup>41</sup> Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mark Johnson, President

Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

**Palm Sunday – April 9, 2017**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 161 (Red Hymnal)

"Hosanna, Loud Hosanna"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Isaiah 50:4-9) The Book of the Prophet Isaiah is a rich source of prophecy concerning the coming Messiah. Christians have not manufactured this connection. Jesus himself, along with the Holy Writers of the New Testament, confirmed this fact by quoting and applying many of Isaiah's prophecies to Jesus as the Messiah. Our first lesson on this Palm Sunday foretold both the abuse that Jesus would suffer, together with his resolution to carry out the work of our salvation.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 8 (Page 27)

**The Gospel Lesson:** (John 12:31-41) Not only are the prophecies of Isaiah here applied to Jesus, Jesus himself testifies that he is the Light of the world – the world's Savior despite the fact that that world continues to reject him as such. Yet how amazing that Jesus completed his work even while knowing full well that so many would despise and reject both him and his work of redemption.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 725 (Brown Hymnal)

"No Tramp of Soldiers' Marching Feet"

## The Sermon – Text: Philippians 2:5-11 (Printed on the back page)

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## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 367 (Red Hymnal)

"Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus"

## The Offering

## The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

## The Closing Hymn – 54 (Red Hymnal)

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance – Sunday (40) Ave (44) Wednesday (18)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Maundy Thursday Service
<b>Friday</b>	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Good Friday Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-8:30 a.m.</b>	– Men's Breakfast at St Paul
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Easter Sunday Service
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

**CLC News** – Pastor Neal Radichel is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Pastor David Schaller is considering the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven. Claire Abbas is considering the call to Gethsemane Lutheran, Spokane Valley WA. Paul Tiefel III is considering the call to Grace Lutheran, Sleepy Eye MN. Becky McKenney, Fort Atkinson WI, has returned the call to serve as the second teacher of St. Stephen Lutheran School, Mountain View CA. Messiah Lutheran, Eau Claire WI, has called member Becky Buck to be 3-4 grade teacher for next year. Pastor Emeritus Gordon Radtke was called to his Savior's side this past week. Pastor Radtke was part of the original faculty at ILC and one of their past presidents. He served in the ministry until well into his 90's.

**Church Council Meeting** – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour this morning.

**Holy Week** – Our Maundy Thursday commemoration is scheduled for 7pm this Thursday (Holy Communion will be offered) followed by our Good Friday service on Friday at 7pm. Please note that Holy Communion will be offered on Maundy Thursday, and then again on Sunday, April 23. Please also remember the Annual Men's Breakfast on Easter Sunday. Serving time is 8:30-9:30am, followed by our Easter Sunday service at 10am.

**Confirmation** – Students and parents please note that we return to our normal Wednesday 6pm class time this week.