

"Palm Sunday – Strength"

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:

Based on your reading of God's Word, how would you describe Jesus the man, Jesus the human being? Many worthy adjectives have been ascribed to him. He was kind, gentle, considerate, humble, holy, perfect. All fitting and accurate, of course, yet there is, I believe, a noun that better sums up Jesus the man – a word tragically absent from most descriptions: strength. It was, in fact, how Jesus manifested his unparalleled strength that truly defines him for us.

That is the simple theme we will explore on this Palm Sunday morning – "*Strength*." The text that will form the basis of our study is found in the 2nd Chapter of Paul's Letter to the Philippians:

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

This is the Word of 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 each of us through the study of these words, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

We have often noted in the past how Jesus was meticulously careful to avoid saying anything that his enemies could use to condemn him. He was able to communicate who and what he was, while always crafting his words in such a way that they could not be used by his enemies. He spoke in symbols, pictures, and 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 *purposely*, 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 were obviously familiar with the words of 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 by entering Jerusalem according to that Old Testament prophecy, Jesus was wordlessly declaring himself to be Israel's Promised Messiah. This fact was further emphasized when Jesus refused his enemies' demands to quiet the crowds as they shouted 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 a donkey? Could they condemn him for what *others* said about him, or because of who or what others believed him to be? 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. Jesus was in control. 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.

It is, by the way, a rather interesting expression when you stop to think about it – "*the die is cast.*" It is credited to Julius Caesar, who is said to have used the phrase when he crossed the Rubicon River and entered Northern Italy. In constant fear of coups, Roman law prohibited, upon penalty of death, any general from entering Rome with his army. There was a sign at the crossing point of the Rubicon, so historians tell us,

that read (in Latin, of course): *“Beyond this river, no flags, weapons or soldiers shall pass.”* Having crossed into Italy with his army, only one of two outcomes was possible: Caesar would be executed, or he would ascend to the throne in Rome. *“The die is cast”* creates the ominous image of a die in mid-flight, or tumbling about on a table, the outcome absolutely unknown and unknowable until it all played out.

In that sense it absolutely does not fit with the event we celebrate this morning, which we today know as Palm Sunday. In fact far more appropriate would be the frequent misspelling of “die” as “dye.” Where in Caesar’s case the outcome was unknown and unknowable, in Jesus’ case the outcome was beyond question. Jesus went to Jerusalem to die. Therefore when Jesus entered Jerusalem, it would be more fitting to say the *dye* was cast. Throw a handful of dye over water and the outcome is both known and irreversible.

Jesus entered Jerusalem knowing without a doubt that by doing so there was no turning back, and he 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.”***

This is the Palm Sunday aspect of *strength* that we identify in Jesus this morning. Not only did Jesus know that he would die in Jerusalem, he knew that he would die horribly by crucifixion. Still, as we heard in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah 50, ***“he set his face like flint.”*** Would anyone here have the strength of courage to do something like that – to continue on a path that you *knew* would result not only in death by one of the cruelest means devised by man but as an *innocent man* willingly dying for the guilty?

Yet we need to stop here and back up, for it was strength that marked every aspect of Jesus’ entire existence. Our text for this morning identified the very beginning with these words: ***Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*** Consider the strength required by Jesus just to agree to set aside the full use of the divine power and majesty that had been his since before the beginning of time.

Strength manifests itself in many different forms. You and I tend to focus only on physical strength. In fact I have little doubt that if someone, prior to this morning, had asked you to name the strongest man in the Bible, most

would have picked Samson. Physically? Possibly, but in nearly every other way Samson was a very weak man. He was prideful, which is weakness masquerading as strength. He was enslaved and controlled by his passions, too weak to resist. He married godless, unfaithful women and allowed himself to be manipulated and destroyed by them. Clearly there is more to strength than biceps and quads.

The next aspect of Jesus’ strength identified in our text is humility: ***And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*** There is absolutely nothing inherently weak about humility. True humility does not mean that you are weaker than, or inferior to, all others. It means, as Jesus demonstrated, that in a true demonstration of strength you place yourself in service to all others, that you put the needs of others before your own.

Pick any aspect of Jesus’ person and life and you will find strength. Some are readily apparent, as when he made whips and twice cleansed the temple, overturning tables and driving out the criminal money changers. Or in Matthew 23 where he laid into the hypocritical Jewish leaders with his series of powerful *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees...”* Still, most examples of Jesus’ true strength require wisdom and discernment to identify.

What strength it took simply to wait thirty years before beginning his public ministry, every moment of which had to be lived sinlessly. What strength to bear patiently with the slow progress of his disciples and their regular bouts of faithlessness. What strength to resist calling on those 12 legions of angels that the Father would have sent had he but asked. What strength to remain silent when unjustly accused. What strength to resist the temptation to come down from the cross and to thereby close the mouths of those who continued to taunt and insult him even as he suffered in agony. Incredible strength was, in fact, the basis for every other attribute and action of our Savior.

To unbelieving eyes, everything about Jesus was weak. He advocated meekness, which they regarded as the safe haven of the weak and fearful. He wasn’t “man enough” to condemn to death the woman caught in the act of adultery, as the Law of Moses prescribed. He refused to man-up and fight, even when his very life depended on it. He refused to seek manly revenge against his enemies.

By the way, whatever happened to all those manly enemies who opposed Jesus? The sad reality is that 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 who ultimately sentenced to death a man that he knew to be innocent, 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, 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 done, 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 when the legions under Titus laid siege to Jerusalem, slaughtered its inhabitants and utterly destroyed their city and temple in 70 AD.

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 next. This is critical news our old Adams needs to hear: *All who oppose God and reject his Son will fail, with eternal consequences.* From our text: **"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 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 (those who believe in him) always win. Our Savior taught us, by his life and in his death, what true, God-pleasing strength looks like. Our text tells us simply, **"Have this mind among yourselves."** In other words, adopt Jesus' attitude, in every conceivable way – including how he demonstrated true strength.

Jesus entered Jerusalem to the cheers of a few, one day he will return to the deafening jubilation of all the elect. Though once he came **"poor and lowly,"** (his strength masked) the next time he will come **"on the clouds with power and great glory"** – his unrivaled power clearly witnessed by all. Jesus 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 immeasurably transcend our present mortal comprehension. This is what Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm

Sunday to earn for us – forgiveness for all our sins and a place in his heaven. God grant us true strength and courage during our time of grace, and preserve us in the Christian faith that we might join that great assembly at his reappearing. Amen.

ESV **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. ⁵ The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.

ESV **John 12:31-41** Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴ 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?" ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ ¶ 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. ³⁷ Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, ³⁸ 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?" ³⁹ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, ⁴⁰ "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." ⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

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Palm Sunday – April 2, 2023

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 118 (Page 29)

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 – 371 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness"

The Prayers of the Day

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 371 (Stanzas 6-7) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness"

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 and around the world. 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 (42) Average (40) Wednesday (23)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:15 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
Thursday	-7:00 p.m.	– Maundy Thursday Communion Service
Friday	-7:00 p.m.	– Good Friday Service
Next Sunday	-8:00 a.m.	– Men's Breakfast
	-10:00 a.m.	– Easter Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Luke Bernthal is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Mrs. Leah Ude has returned the teaching call to Peace Thru Christ of Middleton. Pastor Norman Greve has accepted the vacancy call to Calvary of Marquette. That congregation has applied for a seminary graduate. Redemption of Seattle and Ascension of Tacoma have called Pastor Chad Seybt.

Holy Week Schedule – Please note the schedule for Holy Week and Easter Sunday, and make every effort to avail yourself of these special worship opportunities.

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

Music Festival – Our first (hopefully annual) Music Festival is scheduled for Sunday, May 7. The service will include a greater focus on worship through music. For more information, and especially if you wish to participate, please see Sandy Roehl or Hope Meyer.

After Banquet Donations – We will again be sending a donation to ILC to help with the cost of the After Banquet Party. See Sandy Roehl for details.