

"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 as *"having a tiger by the tail"* or, the more recent version, *"Jumping the shark."* The general meaning is the same: human beings miscalculate, they get themselves into impossible situations, and the results are often catastrophic.

History is full of epic, often catastrophic miscalculations. The leadership at AT&T decided that the "internet thing" was never going to amount to anything so they decided not to pursue it. Touch-tone land lines were the future. Epic miscalculation. A NASA orbiter crashed into Mars in 1999, resulting in a \$350M loss and public embarrassment. A subsequent investigation revealed that while NASA used metric measurements in its calculations, the contractor that built the spacecraft used imperial. Oops.

The list of historic miscalculations is almost endless. 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. Failing to learn from Napoleon's catastrophic mistake 130 years earlier, Hitler didn't equip his divisions with winter gear when they invaded Soviet Russia 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. Saddam Hussein was certain that the rest of the world wouldn't mind if he invaded Kuwait.

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 help us to better understand this event, revealing also the catastrophic consequences of that epic miscalculation, 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 God's Word, 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 in the 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 both intentional and masterful. Think of the challenge of communicating 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 therefore 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"** (thereby cleverly referring to his own death and resurrection). 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 Jesus' earthly ministry.

On Palm Sunday we see more of the Master at work. On this day 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 therefore well aware of that which was foretold 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 understood 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 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? Behold the Master at work, conveying the message of who and what he was while continuing to frustrate his enemies as they sought in vain for evidence to condemn him. Jesus was in control, and he knew that he still had work to do from Sunday through Thursday, including 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 commemorate this morning, known 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 fought here, in David's City, Jerusalem.

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, 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 we can't help but wonder 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. Despite their initial fears, maybe 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 kingdom on earth.

No doubt the crowds were also carried away by the moment. Crowds still today are very good at getting carried away. Though they too might well have questioned the wisdom of Jesus coming to Jerusalem, they nonetheless 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 had to have filled Jesus' enemies with a sense of foreboding. Surely they must have initially imagined that as soon as Jesus entered their power center (Jerusalem) 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. Ironically enough, Jesus' plan was identical to their own, although obviously for very different reasons. 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 miscalculation in the history of mankind. In plotting Jesus' death, he was also thereby enabling Jesus' own plan for the rescue and salvation of mankind. The reality is that 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 succeed in the future. He must have 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 Jesus. 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 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. Secular historical accounts indicate that 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!"*** were granted their wish by Rome. Roman legions 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, if they died in unbelief, 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, ¹¹ 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."***

This is exactly what you and I should take from this day – both the law and the gospel. Jesus' enemies always fail; his allies always win. Recognize also 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 transcend our present mortal comprehension. God preserve each of us in our Christian faith that we too might join that great assembly at his reappearing. Come, Lord Jesus! 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.

^{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.



ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

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

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

Palm Sunday – March 29, 2026

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 313

"Hosanna, Loud Hosanna"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 1ff. (Blue Hymnal)

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

The First 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 24 (Page 65)

The New Testament 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 the 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 (Blue Hymnal page 5)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 311

"No Tramp of Soldiers' Marching Feet"

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

"The Epic Miscalculation"

The Offertory – (Blue Hymnal page 7)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 446 (Stanzas 1-5)

"Jesus, Your Blood and Righteousness"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 446 (Stanzas 6-7)

"Jesus, Your 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 (30) Average (38) Wednesday (20)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship Meal
	-12:30 p.m.	– Church Council and W.F. meetings
Thursday	-7:00 p.m.	– Maundy Thursday Communion Service
Friday	-7:00 p.m.	– Good Friday Tenebrae Service
Next Sunday	-8:00 a.m.	– Men's Easter Breakfast
	-10:00 a.m.	– Easter Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Messiah of Eau Claire has called Pastor Michael Wilke. Mt. Zion of Detroit has called Pastor David Pfeiffer. Teacher Noah Ohlmann has returned the call to Messiah School of Eau Claire, WI. Holy Cross of Phoenix has called Pastor Rob Sauers. Living Hope of Appleton, WI has called Pastor Jonah Albrecht.

Holy Week – Our Holy Week schedule includes our Maundy Thursday Communion Service at 7pm on Thursday, a Tenebrae Service at 7pm on Good Friday, the annual Men's Easter Breakfast on Sunday from 8-9:30, and our Easter Sunday Service at 10am.

Fellowship Meal and Meetings – A fellowship meal is planned for this morning following the worship service, after which both the Church Council and the Women's Fellowship are scheduled to meet.

ILC Visitors Day – Immanuel Lutheran High School in Eau Claire, WI will host their annual High School Visitors Day on Friday, May 1, 2026 for students grades 7 and up. More info at www.ilc.edu.

CLC Summer Camp – Registration is open for this year's camp. To register go to <https://youthcampclc.wixsite.com/camp/register> or email questions to youthcamp.clc@gmail.com.