

1 Matthew 21 – Palm Sunday – Confirmation

It was a wonderful day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. His faithful people greeted him, some following behind him and others going ahead of him, laying their clothes and palm branches on the ground, calling out to him for their salvation. They said, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” recognizing him as the promised Messiah and King of Israel. They said, “Hosanna to the Highest One,” recognizing him as the Lord of all. They said, “Hosanna,” which means, “Save now!” They recognized him as the Savior. And this Savior King comes into his city. He brings righteousness, but not as threatening judgment on sinners. No, here his righteousness is found in his great humility and meekness. He comes so that his people can receive him. He comes with peace and mercy. He comes in the name of the Lord, giving light to those who dwelt in darkness. It truly was a wonderful day for God’s people.

Yet, among all the rejoicing and shouts of praise to their Savior, his people did not know the great sadness that was about to happen near the end of that very week. They were rejoicing, but they would soon mourn and lament. They were gathered as a great congregation, but their Shepherd would soon be struck down, and they would be scattered like scared sheep. As the pharisees said with envy, the world was going after him. But soon the world would crucify him, and the joys in the church would be clouded with sorrow.

Today is a wonderful day. Today three young people in our congregation are confessing their faith. They know what they believe. They know they have more to learn, but they’ve learned a lot, and they are eager to confess the Word of their Savior. Their family and fellow saints are eager to confess with them. They look with joy to their Savior who comes to them in his Spirit and Word, his body and his blood, to comfort them and strengthen them all the more in the joy of their salvation.

Alton, Alivia, and Evan, this is a day to rejoice. It is the day the Lord has made, and you should be glad. To confess your faith in the presence of God and his church is a great blessing. To speak with confidence after going through years of instruction and learning God’s holy Word is an occasion to honor. Today you confess and confirm the gifts God gave you in your baptism. You articulate and affirm that Christ, by his righteous act in your place, has brought you righteousness and life. He gave you a new life in your baptism, and he promises to nurture you in this new life by his Word and sacrament.

Do you know what an altar call is? It’s this thing they do in certain churches where the pastor calls for anyone who wants to give his life to Jesus to come up from the congregation and make that commitment, say some kind of prayer, and invite the Lord Jesus into his heart. Now, you have all learned that we cannot come to faith by making a decision. St. Paul says that we were by nature dead in our sins, but God made us alive in Christ. Faith doesn’t come from man’s running or desiring but from God who shows mercy (Rom 9:16). Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17). As you yourselves confess, “I believe that I cannot, by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” You know that people don’t become Christians by coming up to the altar and making a decision. No, people become Christians by God coming to them in his Word, replacing their hearts of stone, and giving them his Holy Spirit.

2 Matthew 21 – Palm Sunday – Confirmation

So you would think we don't do altar calls. But consider what you are about to do this morning. My grandpa used to say that we Lutherans have the best altar calls. Sure, we don't believe that these altar calls are how we become Christians. You all became believers when the Holy Spirit caused you to be reborn in your baptism. But the altar calls at our church are done after years of solid instruction in the six chief parts of Christian doctrine. Here, today, you are called to the altar to give a confession of what you have learned from God's Word. You know what you have been taught, and you are eager to confess it. It's a wonderful day. It's a day where we should rejoice that you learned the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. It's a day to rejoice that you learned what your Savior says about Baptism, the power of the Keys, and his body and blood. You have learned how to confess your faith, and here you are to confess it. Here you confess your Savior who comes to you in meekness. He comes as the promised Anointed One in his Word and Sacrament. He comes continually to save you and declare you righteous. This is what you are confessing. And the fact that you can confess it is something to rejoice over.

Yet, among all your rejoicing, singing, and encouragement from your fellow Christians, much like the faithful people in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, you also don't know what hardships are still to come. You can't predict the afflictions and sorrows that are in store for you. But be assured that your faith will be tested in the coming years. You learned the meaning of the First Commandment. You have learned that all of the commandments flow in and out of this: that you should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Yet, the devil will tempt you with anything he can to make you fear, love, and trust in something else. With youthful zeal, you confess your Savior today, but the devil is determined to catch you in your youthful passions and make you forget the Lord who bought you. The world will pressure you to compromise what you have learned to confess today. And when you accomplish something worthwhile, like winning some competition or getting accepted to college, the world will teach you to boast in your own works and powers rather than in the grace and power of the gospel.

These temptations get you to forget what you have learned. And too many young people just like you fall for them, showing up to church less and less until the cares and pleasures of this life have completely choked their faith dead. Too many young Christians quickly forget the promise they made at their Confirmation, that they would faithfully hear God's Word and receive the Lord's Supper, that they would suffer all even death rather than fall away from this confession and church. I pray that this doesn't happen to any of you. I pray for your parents, that they would not stop teaching you – and would teach you even more – to hold the preaching of God's Word more sacred than anything in this world. I pray that you don't get caught up in a life of drugs, sexual immorality, or worldly living. I pray that, while you may be attacked by these things, you would finally overcome them and keep the victory Christ has won for you.

Again, these are the temptations to forget what you have learned. They are fierce enough by themselves. But there are other fierce trials and afflictions in store for you.

What these trials and afflictions will be, I don't know. None of us knows for sure. But in whatever way you have to suffer, be prepared with prayer and faith, and don't lose sight of the words of your Savior. If you have to fail a class, lose your job, a friend, or even

3 Matthew 21 – Palm Sunday – Confirmation

your life because you refuse to speak lies that dishonor the name of your Savior, then remember what Jesus says: “Rejoice and be glad, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” When you must face the death of a loved one or even your own death, and the devil torments you with the fear of death, then remember the words of Jesus: “I am the Resurrection and the Life. Anyone who believes in me will live even though he dies.” When some false teacher tries to get you to find the Holy Spirit in your own feelings, emotions, and experiences, then remember where Jesus tells you to find the Holy Spirit. He says, “My words are Spirit, and they are Life.” When this self-righteous world boasts in the power of self-righteous men, don’t be ashamed to confess the gospel, which you have learned is the power of God to save all who believe, because it reveals the righteousness of God, which you have by faith in your Savior.

It's important for you to know that trials and afflictions are in store for you. So don't be a fool. Prepare yourself for these things. Keep coming to church. Keep reading your Bible at home. Don't stop reviewing the Catechism. Read the Large Catechism. Talk about it with your parents and your siblings as you sit, stand, eat, sleep, work, and travel. The Word of God will prepare you for the crosses that are ahead. Therefore, don't let the sorrows in the future discourage you. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing with you today. And let tomorrow worry about itself. God has prepared your works for you to walk in as well as your crosses for you to bear, and he promises to work it all out.

When you rely on God's Word, then you don't need to be afraid of what will happen in the future. Consider what Jesus did. He sent his disciples into the town over to get a donkey and a colt. They found them just as Jesus said they would. His Word never returns empty. It always accomplishes what he sets it out to do. When the crowds were rejoicing and praising Jesus, it was all because God's Word drew them to Jesus. So it didn't really matter that they weren't aware of the great sadness, which was about to take place. Because Jesus knew. Jesus knew what was ahead of him in Jerusalem. He knew where he was going. He was on his way to bear our sins on the cross and reconcile us sinful mortals back to the living God. He knew the sorrows that were in store for him. But he counted the shame of his cross as a little thing compared to the joy of winning our salvation.

Jesus knew the sorrows that were ahead of him, and he knows the sorrows that are ahead of all of us. But he calls us to be at peace and rejoice in his salvation. He calls us to look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. If that is our ultimate future, then why should we be afraid of what might happen in the meantime? As we confess our faith, adoring our Lord with palms of praise, we can be confident that our faith stands on Christ the solid cornerstone, regardless of what waves and storms lay ahead. Amen.