

In Like A Lion, Out Like A Lamb

Palm Sunday

April 14, 2019

Luke 23:1-49

Today's service looks at both Palm Sunday and the Passion of our Lord. To better understand this dual focus, our sermon must begin back in ancient Egypt; for it is there that we hear of the Lion and the Lamb.

I. In Like a Lion

In Egypt, the brothers gather around their dying father's bedside; and one by one, he speaks a blessing or woe upon them. The father is Jacob, and these are the brothers of Joseph-Joseph whom they sold into slavery. Judah waits his turn, and he ought to be worried: Jacob has spoken to three so far, and each one has received a curse. Clearly, Judah can't claim sainthood; along with the betrayal of Joseph, there's some public immorality that has brought shame upon the family. Judah's sins are well known, and he does not deserve a blessing. And now, having finished with Simeon and Levi, his father turns to him. If a curse comes, Judah's got it coming.

But instead, Jacob speaks a blessing. He says, Judah is a lion's cub; "From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he crouched down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; And to him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:9-11).

From Judah's descendants, Jacob prophesies, a Lion will arise. He will be King, a son of those who bear the scepter in Judah throughout the ages. He will come to His people; and when He comes, He will be called Shiloh-He will be called "peace," because this King is the Prince of Peace who removes the strife of sin. This King shall be the obedience of the people; where they-like Judah-have failed to keep God's commands, the One who comes as a Lion will obey God for them. He will come with donkey and colt; and He will bind them to a vine. And having come, He will wash His garments in wine, in blood of grapes.

For Judah and all of his sons and daughters, Jacob announces hope: The Lion will come and bring peace. One can't help but think of Judah's blessing when hearing of Palm Sunday and the days that follow. Jesus Christ, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5), rides into Jerusalem of Judea on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He is the righteous Son of God, obedient to His Father in all things for your sake.

He comes to bring peace with God by defeating sin. Thus, when the crowds cry out "Hosanna!" or "Save now!", they are crying for the peace that He brings with them. During the week, He will eat supper with His disciples; and during that Supper, He will bind them to wine and blood, along with bread and body, for the forgiveness of sins. He will do all this, and no one can do a thing to stop Him. Like a Lion, He pounces on the moneychangers and drives them away, and no one can lift a finger against Him. His power and authority are evident.

Truly, this entry into Jerusalem is a triumphal entry. He comes as King. He comes as Savior. When He enters the city, He comes in like a lion.

II. Out Like a Lamb

Five days later, He goes out like a lamb. He goes out like the Lamb of Isaiah 53: All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. (Is. 53:6-7)

In Old Testament times, the Passover Lamb was bound for four days before its slaughter; Christ has been bound to four trials (one each before Caiaphas and Herod, two before Pilate) leading up to His death. After four trials, He has been found guilty of no sin; in fact, His innocence has only been reinforced. Like that Passover Lamb, Christ remains blameless and without spot; He has done nothing to deserve this fate. Although He has been accused of many sins, He has remained silent and opened not His mouth. He is not there to defend Himself. He is there to redeem you and me.

In Egypt, the Passover lamb was sacrificed to save the firstborn sons of Israel; it suffered plague and death instead of them. This is why Christ leaves the Jerusalem that Good Friday: It is not that the stray sheep are driving the Lamb out of the fold (!), but that the Lord has laid the iniquity of us all on Him, and He is going to destroy it on the cross. Rather than have us suffer plague and death for our sin, Christ shoulders the sin, takes the judgment and dies in our place. Like the Passover Lamb, He is the substitute-the Sacrifice for our sin, so that we might have forgiveness and life.

Lambs don't have the fearsome reputation of lions. In fact, they're helpless, meek, easily defeated. But do not be dismayed or deceived by the weakness you see in the Passion of our Lord. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, saves you there: He bears your sin and weakness to the cross, suffering for it there. Risen again, He declares that you are forgiven, that He has forgiveness for your sin and strength for your weakness.

So as you have heard the reading of the Passion of our Lord this day, ponder Christ, the Lion and the Lamb. Affliction may seek to render you so weak so as to believe that not even God could help you. At such times, remember Palm Sunday, how Christ comes in like a lion to defeat His enemies, and yours. Remember that He comes with peace, to save you now, and do not be dismayed. He comes to bring peace to you, to give you His strength and salvation. Guilt would seek to have you say, "God is indeed powerful, but I am far too sinful for Him to care about me." At such times, remember the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. For if He has taken away the sins of the world, then He has taken away your sin, too. Rejoice in His cross. Hear His Word of peace and forgiveness.

Cling to Christ the vine, who gives you wine and blood, bread and body for your salvation. The palms and Passion, the life and the death are all part of the Lord's work for you, so that you may be certain that, without a doubt, you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen