

“More Than Today”

Liturgical Date: Palm Sunday/Confirmation (C)

Primary Text: St. John 12:12-19, 20-43; Psalm 118:19-29; Philippians 2:5-11

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Today’s sermon for Palm Sunday Confirmation references Psalm 118, Philippians 2, and St. John 12. The title of sermon is “More Than Today”, as both for Jesus on Palm Sunday and for our confirmands today-the day is important but not the end of the journey.

Palm Sunday is a special day on the Church Calendar. I mean normally, we start the Divine Service inside-but today we didn’t. We observed the tradition of re-enacting, in a small way, the welcome that met Jesus as He entered the Holy City of Jerusalem for the last time during His earthly ministry. Many churches of various denominations all over the world are observing this procession of palms, as has been done for centuries. During Lent the liturgy and hymns are more somber, but on Palm Sunday shouts ring out not of “Alleluia” yet, but of “Hosanna” which is the Hebrew word for “save us now.” Suffering and death still await Jesus from Thursday through Saturday. But the entrance we heard read was indeed large and joyous. The King has arrived, greeted by cheering throngs of people waving palm branches-an ancient symbol of victory. Psalm 118:19, *“Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.”*

And Palm Sunday is one of the days, along with Easter Vigil and Pentecost, that the church has traditionally observed the Rite of

Confirmation. Confirmation is also a celebratory day that has come after a period of preparation. I believe that Summer and Jordan would agree with that assessment. They have been pretty busy being taught, as we say in the church catechized, over the last 2 years.

I can assure you that they have been thoroughly instructed, worked hard, and learned much. While many other denominations also observe a period of instruction and Confirmation, we Lutherans have the reputation of taking it very seriously and having rigorous requirements. And while in some places the curriculum has been made less taxing and many of the traditions that have accompanied confirmation have fallen by the wayside, I must say that I am pretty old-school when it comes to Catechism instruction and Confirmation. Let me tell you what Jordan and Summer have successfully accomplished: 2 years of instruction that totaled 67 classes; serving in the church including as acolytes, memorizing 45 Bible verses and passages, memorizing all of the six chief parts of Luther's Small Catechism including the questions and answers, learning the books of the Bible, numerous other memory assignments including Luther's statement at the Diet of Worms, the 11 documents of the Book of Concord, Luther's morning and evening prayers, completing 12 sermon reports, passing 14 written tests with a score of 80 or above, reading a biography of Martin Luther and creating a project based on it, passing a written as well as a public oral exam, and undergoing a one on one interview session with me. So with all of the assignments behind them and checked off, they would join with the Psalmist in proclaiming, *"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*

So why? The Bible does say instruction in doctrine and confessing the faith publically is needed, but it does not lay out specific periods of time and requirements. So why did I require you to do all of those things? Well, there are several reasons and our Epistle for today from Philippians 2 gets to the heart of the matter, *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”* Jesus is our model. He is our Master Teacher. And we are His disciples. A disciple endeavors to learn from his or her teacher and then to share that message with others. We must know what Christianity is all about and be able to share it with others. Psalm 119:11 states, *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”* Jesus says in St. Matthew 10:32, *“Whoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”* Verses 10-11 of Philippians 2, *“That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* In taking your Confirmation vows before God and His people assembled here today, you have the chance to do just that. We sang that the Lord would arm His soldiers, and we are armed with His Word, His Spirit being imparted into us.

If you are raised in the Lutheran Church you are baptized as a baby. This means that someone else spoke, your parents and godparents, for you on that day. You don't remember what happened because you were too young. Now this does not mean what happened at your Baptism was not valid-far from it. God reached down from heaven and in the waters of Holy Baptism called you as His child and you were indwelled with the Holy Ghost. Confirmation is, in a sense, a

renewal of those vows. You will now speak those words your yourself, with your own lips by the power of the Spirit working in you-rejecting the devil and all his wicked works and ways, confessing faith in the Triune God, and pledging to serve Him even unto death. And if you were to examine the questions asked in the order for Baptism, Confirmation, as well as the reception of new members by profession of faith you would see that the questions asked in all three of those are very similar.

Another aspect of Confirmation here at Christ the King Lutheran Church is that one becomes a communicant member of the congregation and is eligible to become a voting member. You are moving from childhood to more of an adult role in the congregation. St. Paul instructs us in 1 Corinthians 11:28 concerning receiving the Lord's Supper, *"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that break and drink of that cup."* Summer and Jordan will receive their First Communion later in the Divine Service. They will receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins and strengthening of faith. And they will receive this Sacrament worthily, having been thoroughly instructed and therefore able to examine themselves.

As I stated before, I am a traditionalist when it comes to Confirmation. But there is one tradition that we could do without when it comes to Confirmation in the Lutheran Church. And that is the unfortunate fact that after Confirmation many young people's involvement in the Church decreases rather than increases. I have witnessed cases where a family will bring their child to Confirmation

and then disappear after Confirmation (not just the confirmed, but the whole family!). Confirmation is a very important milestone but not the end goal. Palm Sunday was not the end goal of Jesus. It was about more than that one day and Confirmation is about more than today.

Some congregations have taken the approach of downplaying confirmation and making it less of a big deal in trying to communicate that this is not a “graduation from church”. They say, we make it too much like graduation: there are gowns, certificates, cake, and gifts. But I have never bought into that school of thought. This *is* a day worthy of celebration. Just like on Palm Sunday the problem was not that people were making too big of a deal about Jesus on that day, the problem was that most of them didn’t keep up that devotion and excitement after it.

Let me illustrate this with something relating to high school graduation. Years ago I saw young person not far from here wearing a T-shirt that said on the front “_____ High School Senior Class.” I am not going to give the name of the school (it was in this area though) in following Luther’s admonition in the meaning of the Eight Commandment to “put the best construction on everything” as I am hoping this T-shirt was not made by the school itself, but by the students. This is why I say that. Because on the back of this T-shirt it read in successive lines, “13 years; 2,340 days; 16,380 hours; 982,800 second; and all I got was a lousy sheet of paper!”

Now that is a pretty cynical and even sad way to look at your high school graduation. But unfortunately that is what some people view it as. “I have jumped through all the hoops. I am going to get some presents now. And I don’t ever have to crack another books or learn

anything else in my life.” Now I would not suggest that high schools stop holding graduations because some are not viewing it rightly anymore than I would want churches to stop celebrating confirming young people because some will walk away from the faith. If you view Confirmation as the end goal as “clearing the bar” and now you don’t have to study your Bible, attend church, and continue to grow in faith than it is no surprise if your faith dwindles. But if you view it correctly, as a milestone and transition along your journey of faith with Jesus then you can expect to continue to grow.

You see, If Jesus were only a man-remember that He was true man and true God-He could have seen the big and enthusiastic crowds on Palm Sunday and thought He had reached the pinnacle. He could have settled for being an earthly king. But that is not what He was sent to do. On Thursday night he would institute the Lord’s Supper and then be betrayed. On Friday He would be beaten, mocked, and die an agonizing death on the cross. As Jesus said in St. John 12:32 said, *“if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”* But in this He would win salvation for the world. He would do what only He could do to save us from our sin. And then He would rise from the dead in victory over sin, death, and the devil on Sunday. He would ascend to heaven and He will return on the Last Day as the Judge and eternally reigning King. Yes, there was more to come after that one Palm Sunday.

And there is more to come for you two after this one Sunday. It is not always going to be easy. There will be challenges. You are entering a different world, more hostile to Biblical Christianity, than the one your parents and grandparents grew up in. But be strong in the Lord. Don’t

love the praise of people more than the praise of God (John 12:43). He is with you. He is the cornerstone. By grace through faith in Jesus, eternal life has been delivered to you by the Holy Spirit. Confess Him today boldly. Let your tongue lift praises to Him everyday. As today's Psalm said, *"Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever."*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.