

Zechariah 9: 9-12
Philippians 2: 5-11
John 12: 12-19

Overview:

Palm Sunday

The war between God and man could only find peace through the work of Jesus Christ. His birth brought peace to the Earth and his death and resurrection brought peace to Heaven.

Lesson:

Reflection on these final days before Easter must be viewed within the fabric of man's rebellion and God's redemption of his creation. It must also be viewed within the context of our own lives. What war are we raging where Christ needs to bring peace? We are called to reflect on the grace of God and the work of Jesus for our own lives.

Message: War and Peace

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Six thousand years ago, it started. Up until that point there was peace; peace between Earth and Heaven but it all changed when man lost the Word and abandoned his trust in God. This was never God's plan. This was never how it was supposed to be. We were to walk in the presence of Him, righteous and faithful. We were to worship Him in communion with the angels in heaven and with our offspring on Earth. Instead of seeking God, we sought a battlefield, and the one we chose had a tree growing in the middle of it. This tree was planted by God to serve as an outward expression of Adam's worship to Him. The world was at Adam's feet, but the tree – that tree was out to be out of reach and obeying this single command would display the love that Adam had for his creator.

The battlefield was expansive: Heaven claimed one side and on it stood the Triune God; man and Satan claimed the other.

History records the opening shot taken by Eve with fruit but by that point, the war had already begun. The consumption of fruit was not the weapon but simply an artifact of the first strike – the real shot that opened the field was man's loss of faith and trust in his creator.

Picture this: the lines are drawn the battle prepared, and the soldiers aligned. Satan challenges Eve about God's hidden intention behind his Word. She replies, "but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of Paradise God commanded us not to eat or touch it, lest we surely die." This is the moment when she begins to doubt God's motives and begins to believe Satan's lies that God is withholding divinity from humanity. She begins to believe that the Word is not rooted in grace and that **good** is something that must be grasped.

And so, even before the first step toward the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil there was incomprehensible damage. Man had turned away from God and war had been waged.

What is so strikingly illustrative of God's great grace is that even though we were the ones on the offensive, He still sought us out. "Where are you?" God called to Adam. **You see, in our sin we hide, but in our sin God seeks.** He never stops pursuing us this side of Heaven.

Full of grace. Full of patience. Full of mercy. He calls us to us.
Full of rage. Full of sin. Full of selfishness. We fight against Him.

And the battle between Earth and Heaven rages on.

This would have continued forever if not for the birth of our leader, our king. Although we had started the war, we were unable to end it and we would never be able to win it.

Yes, I know that it is not Christmas, but this event is critical in the war's history.

One night in Bethlehem a baby was born on Earth – born on our field to fight on our side. He was sent by God to be our King in the battle we were raging **against God Himself**. Don't miss this point: God sent us a king to join our army in our war against God Himself! The plan from the King was not to conquer Heaven, of course, but to bring about peace.

And so, Luke records that on the night of Jesus' birth,
there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,
"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Peace on Earth. This is what the birth was all about. Peace on Earth.

What is recorded in Luke is not a wish or a prophecy; it was a statement. There was, at that moment, peace on Earth. He had come to free us from Satan's grip and confine him to the boundaries of Hell.

There was peace on Earth because God was present, in the flesh.

<PAUSE>

But the war raged on. It couldn't stop simply because one side found peace. We were free from Satan but our real enemy – the side we were really rebelling against, was God and Heaven. We were still under judgement from above and there could be no escape through any action of our own. Without intervention we would surely be crushed and condemned.

And so, in our Gospel reading today we find that our king, our intervener, the one who could judge, condemn, and destroy us but, instead, entered Earth as a humble baby to save us, now entered

Jerusalem to end the war. He didn't storm the city mounted on a horse, with shield and sword drawn. Instead, He slowly entered riding on a donkey. It was a humble entrance, just like his birth, but it was an entrance that would dramatically change the past, present, and future.

We didn't read Luke's account but in there he records that:

*"the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! **Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"** -Luke 19:37b-38*

Peace in Heaven. This is what his death and resurrection was all about. **Peace in Heaven.**

As Jesus hung on the cross, God turned his face and abandoned Him. The perfect life that Christ lived, and the sacrifice of his body reconciled us to God brought us eternal life and ended our war.

There was finally peace on Earth and peace in Heaven. We started the war, God fought it for us but gave us the victory.

Six thousand years ago the war started. Two thousand years ago the war ended. And, for all eternity we celebrate the victory that Christ Jesus earned and then handed to us. **Today**, we celebrate the beginning of the end to this war. Today we reflect back to the day that our humble, but all powerful, all mighty King began his final steps towards His cross.

As we enter this dark period of Lent, we also reflect on the battle that we still wage with God. Even though the war is over, we are still sinful human beings. We still fight God, turn from Him, and rebel against him as if we were still soldiers on Satan's field. For me, I fight him when I push Him aside in my life and replace him with something else – like my job, or even my family. I attack him when I fail to serve others as He has called me to do – when I find that my time and my earthly destination is more important than meeting the needs of those around me.

What about you? Where do you attack God? Where do you turn away from Him? What weapons do you hold in your life?

Today we remember the quiet and humble entrance of King Jesus into Jerusalem to end the war and save us. This is also a time to remind ourselves that as much as we try, as large our desire, we are incapable of setting down the weapons in our own lives. We find it impossible to believe that the fighting is complete, and that we are at peace.

And so today, as we watch Jesus ride a simple donkey and move closer to His death, we pray to the Holy Spirit for strength. Today we make a renewed call for the Holy Spirit to build in us a faith that is strong and solid and will turn us towards God's loving face.

Let's pray.

Lord, on this Palm Sunday, so long ago, the people “took palm branches and went out to meet [you], shouting ‘Hosanna!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Blessed is the king of Israel!’” and then, only a few days later, they crucified Him. We find it impossible to believe and yet, in the midst of our busy lives, in the flurry of our daily activities, we, too cry out “Hosanna” only to call out soon after “Crucify Him!”

Lord, we can say that we are sorry, but we know that in a short while we’ll again turn from you, attack you, and reject you.

But we also know that your love and your patience are immeasurable. We know that each time we turn back towards you we find your arms welcoming and our sins forgiven. We are so thankful for this. Lord, we brought the war, but you brought our king, and our king brought peace. We pray for the Holy Spirit to make a home in our hearts and strengthen our faith so that we continue to turn towards you after every time we turn away. We pray that He build in us a love for you that is but a shadow of your love for us. Lord we thank you for all that you are, all that you have done, and all that continue to do for each one of us.

In your name we pray. Amen.