

Notes for Next Sunday

Palm Sunday

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Zechariah 9:9-12). The Lord's saving work on behalf of His people is foretold using illustrations based on OT history. God's enemies suffer defeat for breaking His Holy Law. They will learn that "the wages of sin is death" (Rm 6:23). But those who repent and cling in faith to the Messiah will be covered with His righteousness and enjoy His rule of peace.

Epistle (Philippians 2:5-11). Paul couples the imperatives of a Christian life with a description of Christ, who makes that life possible. We are certainly not lords, nor have we any excuse for refusing to honor Jesus Christ as Lord. Yet the fulfillment of the imperative to live like Christ is supported by all that Christ gives freely: the encouragement, comfort, love, and mind of Christ, along with the participation of the Spirit.

Gospel (John 12:20-43). This long reading divides into three segments:

12:20–26 When some Greeks want to see Jesus, He uses the occasion to proclaim His death and the fruit it will bear. Too often we are tempted to think that we are really "living" when we are indulging in life's sinful pleasures. Christ promises everlasting life to all who deny themselves and trust in Him. He shows us the meaning of abundant life

12:27–36a Christ faces the moment of His glory, confirmed by His Father's voice from heaven: the hour when He would be lifted up on the cross so that He could draw all people to Himself. Now is the day of salvation (2Co 6:2); people ignore it at their great peril. Thanks be to God, Christ remains committed to His mission to save the world in spite of its unbelief.

12:36b–43 Some Jews reject Jesus and, under God's judgment, are hardened in unbelief; others believe in Him but refuse to confess Him openly for fear of being removed from the synagogue community. The desire to be accepted by others can stand in the way of a Christian's bold confession of Christ today. Yet, take heart. God has revealed His saving presence (His glory) in the person of His Son, that we may glorify Him before all people.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Zechariah 9:9-12

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. ¹¹ As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. ¹² Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

9:9 rejoice greatly. Those words remind us of Advent. Here hidden in the words of Zechariah is of Jesus coming into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as King. It is also a reference for all Christians to the final fulfillment of prophecy when the Lord comes again victoriously with all of His angels. (PBC)

9:9 Daughter of Zion. God's people are called to welcome their coming King with joyful shouts (cf 2:10). This is a preview to the depiction of the new Jerusalem as the Bride of Christ (Rv 21:2). (TLSB)

9:9 *your king*. The Davidic (“your”) Messianic King. (CSB)

9:9 *riding on a donkey*. A suitable choice, since the donkey was a lowly animal of peace (contrast the war-horse of v. 10) as well as a princely mount before the horse came into common use. The royal mount used by David and his sons was the mule. (CSB)

9:10 *take away the chariots ... war-horses ... battle bow*. All apparatus of war will be removed, Messiah’s rule not being established by physical force, or maintained by military defenses. (PC)

9:10 *Ephraim*. Represents the 10 northern tribes. (PC)

9:10 *His rule will extend from ... to ends of the earth*. Christ’s rule is universal, not limited to geographical boundaries such as earthly kingdoms. We are to be His witnesses “to the end of the earth” (Ac 1:8). (TLSB)

9:11 *waterless pit*. This is a powerful image for at the time cisterns dug in the ground to hold water were sometimes used as cells for prisoners. The pit could also symbolize the hopeless situation of the exile, even death itself. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

9:12 *twice as much*. In place of despair, the Lord promises a double blessing: a secure stronghold and victory over all enemies. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ 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.

2:5 *Your attitude ... the same as ... Christ*. In spite of all that is unique and radically different about the person and work of Christ, Christians are to have his attitude of self-sacrificing humility and love for others. (CSB)

2:6 *equality with God*. Jesus, as the true Son of God, cannot be less than fully God. He is equal with His Father according to His divine nature. (TLSB)

2:6 *something to be grasped*. † Something to be forcibly retained—the glory Christ had with the Father before his incarnation. But he did not consider that high position to be something he could not give up. (CSB)

2:7 *made himself nothing*. Lit. “emptied himself.” He did this, not by giving up deity, but by laying aside his glory and submitting to the humiliation of becoming man. Jesus is truly God and truly man. Another view is that he emptied himself, not of deity itself, but of its prerogatives—the high position and glory of deity. (CSB)

2:7 *nature of a servant*. Emphasizes the full reality of his servant identity. As a servant, he was always submissive to the will of the Father. (CSB)

2:8 *appearance as a man*. Not only was Jesus “like” a human being (v. 7), but he also took on the actual outward characteristics of a man. (CSB)

2:8 *obedient*. Jesus put all His thoughts, words, and actions under the direction of His Father's will. (TLSB)

2:9 *the name ... above every name*. In ancient times, people were given names to describe them. The name of Jesus describes the essence of who He is: "salvation is of the Lord." There is no other savior or means of salvation. "After His resurrection, He entirely laid aside the form of a servant, but not human nature, and was established in the full use, manifestation, and declaration of the divine majesty. In this way He entered His glory" (FC Ep VIII 16). (TLSB)

2:10-11 *bow ... confess*. God's design is that all people everywhere should worship and serve Jesus as Lord. Ultimately all will acknowledge him as Lord (see Ro 14:9), whether willingly or not. (CSB)

GOSPEL – JOHN 12:20-43

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. ²⁷ "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰ Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴ The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?" ³⁵ Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. ³⁶ Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them. ³⁷ Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" ³⁹ For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: ⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them." ⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. ⁴² Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

12:20 *Greeks*. Probably Greek-speaking Gentiles from a place like the Decapolis. (TLSB)

12:21 *Philip*. Perhaps because Philip had a Gk name and came from an area near the Decapolis. (TLSB)

12:23 *glorified*. Jesus was speaking about his death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection and exaltation. (CSB)

12:24 *if it dies, it produces*. The principle of life through death is seen in the plant world. The kernel must perish as a kernel if there is to be a plant. (CSB)

12:25 the man who hates his life ... will keep it. To love one's life here and now—to concentrate on one's own success—is to lose what matters. Supremely, of course, the principle is seen in the cross of Jesus. (CSB)

12:27 this hour. Still the God-man never wavered from His assigned path. He did not cry out in human frailty for the Father to save Him from His ordeal. He had come from heaven for this very purpose, prepared for this.

12:28 The Father had already glorified Christ through His incarnation and earthly ministry (esp miracles and signs); now He was about to glorify Him again through His death and resurrection. (TLSB)

12:32 lifted up. Only in John's Gospel is "lifted up" used of Jesus' crucifixion. (Buls)

12:32 all men. Not that everyone in the world would enter heaven, but Christ would make atonement for everyone's sins and draw people out of every nation to form His Church. (TLSB)

12:37 they still would not believe. The faith of many on Palm Sunday was fickle. Although Jesus had done His miraculous signs in their presence, including the raising of Lazarus, they continued not to believe in Jesus. (PBC)