

Palmarum and Sunday of the Passion

24 March, Anno Domini 2024

Philippians 2:5-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The readings this morning beautifully hold before us the reality of Christ as our atonement and Christ as the example of the sanctified life which we are to strive to follow. We can't have one without the other. There is no sanctification, no holiness, before being washed clean in the Blood of Christ. And we cannot claim to believe in that atonement if we are not daily striving, in light of redemption, to live a holy life according to the Ten Commandments, bringing both our thinking and our doing into alignment with the will of God who redeemed us, putting to death everything in us that is not in perfect agreement with God's Word. This is the very definition of the baptismal life - through daily contrition and repentance drowning the Old Adam with all of his evil thoughts and desires so that a new man who loves and walks according to the Ten Commandments may arise and live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

The apostle calls us to have "this mind" among ourselves. And by "this mind," he is referring, as he says, to the humble, self-sacrificing, obedient mind of Jesus that is on full display during the Passion. Such a mind stands in stark contrast to the mind of the flesh that is arrogant, self-serving, and disobedient and which also is on full display during the Passion.

This is a wonderful opportunity for us to examine our own minds. That is in part why we read the Gospel responsively on this day. We are able to reflection upon the fact that we ourselves have been Judas, Peter, the chief priests, and Pilate. We have betrayed Christ by speaking and acting as though parts of God's Word aren't true, by casting aside the things of faith in hopes of some earthly gain, and by doubting His promises to us in the midst of our afflictions. We have engaged in those things which are unbecoming of a Christian and forbidden by God in order to

maintain friends or even just our standing among unbelievers. We have sought Christ's death by asserting our own will and desires above the clear teaching of Holy Scripture, by remaining in our sin even when the truth is shown to us. We engage in all kinds of deceit and falsehood in order to justify our sins and try to wash our hands in innocency apart from the Blood of Christ. We have remained silent in the face of falsehood hoping to avoid any kind of personal cost.

Rightly do we weep bitter tears of shame and guilt with Peter when the gaze of the Suffering Servant falls upon us and the truth of His Word exposes the deep darkness of our hearts. But wrongly do we despair with Judas. Wrongly do we turn to any work we can do to justify ourselves when our sin is made known to us. Wrongly do we believe that our sin is too great to be forgiven.

Behold the sinless Son of God crucified for your sin. Behold the One upon whom fell every accusation that was absolutely true of you and in no way whatsoever true of Him. Behold Him go without complaint to the cross of your judgment while you chafe and grumble under the cross of your merciful Father's discipline. Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, rather than remaining pridefully aloof from the terrible judgment which we had brought upon ourselves, instead humbled Himself by clothing Himself in our flesh. He did grasp at His divinity and superiority as an excuse to ignore your plight and avoid making Himself unclean with your filth. His will, as a good and true Son, WAS the will of His Father. His only desire was to do what His Father gave Him to do. Nothing more and nothing less. In so doing, He was falsely accused, spit upon, betrayed, mocked, and nailed to the cross...to save you from your unbelief and your lovelessness and bring you into the new life of holiness.

In saving you, in cleansing you by His Blood, He has freed you from the prison house of anger and lust and covetousness and gossip - those things which once condemned you. These are absolutely contrary to Christ and the life you have been given. They have no place in your life as a Christian. As He promised to our fathers, Christ has set us free from our enemies of sin and death so that we might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life.

As the Baptized, we have received the forgiveness of our sins and the Holy Spirit who stirs up in us a new mind whose thoughts are not the thoughts of the flesh or the world. Our minds have been freed from the slavery of things below. Our thoughts are not to be of self. Our desires are not be for mere pleasure or ease or wealth or success or self-promotion. The work of the Spirit is to crucify ALL the desires of the flesh and fill us with new, sanctified, holy desires that look like, speak like, love like, and die like Christ. His IS the life of sanctification. His IS the life of true faith. Behold, the man, the man you were created and redeemed to be! Paul writes in Ephesians “For we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” If we do not want or refuse that life, then we refuse salvation. We refuse Christ.

In Christ there is no vanity, no greed, no worry, no resentment, no immodesty, no coarse talk or foolish joking, no drunkenness. In Christ there is the love of what is true and beautiful and good. There is forgiveness. There is humility. There is unyielding faith in affliction. There is obedience. In Christ, there is daily devotion to the Word of God and prayer. There is love for enemies.

And so it is to be among us, His children, who call God “Father”. Though we have not taken on the form of God in Baptism, we have been remade in His likeness, having put on Christ in whom we are a new creation. Paul writes in Romans that we “have been predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son”. And later in the same letter he expounds on that saying “Abhor what is evil (that which is contrary to God’s Word); hold fast to what is good (to Christ and His Word)”. We are not to be conformed to this world. Rather we are to be transformed by the renewal of our minds as we read and study and meditate upon and discuss the Holy Scriptures; as we pray and sing and attend the Divine Service.

The death of Jesus is a bright dividing line between what is good and what is evil. It’s piercing light illuminates the evil that still lurks in our hearts. It teaches us that all of our sins are of the greatest offense to God and that nothing less than the Blood of God’s Son is sufficient to pay for any of them - be it a single angry

thought or the murder of millions.

But that very same light beckons us out of the darkness. It invites us to be joined to Jesus' death so that His is ours. And all who have been baptized into Jesus' death and take refuge in His Blood will be given a new heart filled with new and holy desires and a new mind filled with new and holy thoughts because they are thoughts that are from God, indeed they are the very thoughts of Christ Himself. The apostle writes in Galatians chapter 2 "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." They are thoughts that are brought into alignment with the Word of God which is His eternal and gracious will. God grant this mind to us all as we gaze upon Him who was crucified for our atonement and Who has set His life before us as a holy pattern for us to emulate to the glory of His Name.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep you hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.