

Philippians 2:5-11

Palm Sunday, Supplement Series A, April 9, 2017

- Theme: A single-minded focus on Jesus
- I. He was humbled to redeem us
 - II. He was exalted to assure us we are redeemed

INJ Palm Sunday shows us Jesus on his way into Jerusalem to suffer and die for the sins of the world. Can you see him riding the donkey while large crowds shout and wave their palm branches? "Hosanna!" they cry out. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

I want you to focus your attention on Jesus. He is fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah as he comes to save. The Psalm talked about him entering the gates in glorious procession. In the Gospel he rides into town. "The whole city was stirred up," it said, "asking 'Who is this?' And the crowds were saying, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'" Do you have Jesus, your Savior, firmly in view?

Look! A squirrel! That's the way we acknowledge we are easily distracted from our focus. We set our sights on Jesus ... and then we talk about ourselves. I am so busy with my life. I carry such heavy burdens! We have church three times this week! Jesus' death and resurrection is the central truth of the Christian faith. Nothing is more important. But look! I have chocolate to purchase and food to make and spring cleaning to do.

St. Paul urges us to have a single-minded focus on Jesus – not only this Holy Week, but all our lives. Here we have the core truths of our faith. See how he was humbled to redeem you and how he was exalted to assure you that you are redeemed! Don't be distracted from Jesus!

The first distraction comes with Paul's encouragement: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:" or "Let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." What kind of attitude do we have? Do you know how you can spot a bad attitude, and how to address it? How can we change our attitude, if it is in need of adjustment? Look! A squirrel! We have lost our focus on Jesus already!

Instead of making our attitudes (as much as they do need change) the focus, Paul keeps Jesus at the center. Keep a single-minded focus on who he is. "Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross."

Who is Jesus? Jesus is God, the Second Person of the Trinity. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, present everywhere, eternal. He was active in the creation of the world and is still active in protecting and preserving our life. This God, your God, determined to save sinners. It took an astounding miracle. The Second Person of the Trinity took on human flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary. His attitude was a willingness to serve and suffer and die for your sin.

But look! Reason tries to distract us from sin's redemption by wondering how God can become human. Maybe ... when Jesus took on human flesh, he ceased to be God. Wrong. Perhaps ... Jesus was God only pretending to be human – it was all a show and not real. Nope. Was Jesus just a bold and brash human teacher who made outrageous claims, and over time others embellished the story. No.

The Scripture is clear. Jesus is God. He "emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant," being born in human likeness. He is fully God. He is fully human. Two natures in one person. We express it by saying Jesus is the God-man. While we are not able to understand it, we confess it. If Jesus is not human, he cannot stand as our Substitute under the law. If he is not God, he cannot pay the price for the sins of the world. Since Jesus is the God-man, he is our Savior. Focus on him!

Paul shows us Jesus – True God and True Man – so we consider his attitude. He humbled himself, not using his divine powers. He "did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed." Jesus didn't show off to gain the adulation of the crowds. There was no "Look at me, I'm God!" He carried the burden of being unknown to many, of being hated by the influential, of being weak and lowly.

Do you know why he did it? Jesus came to save us. We are wretched sinners who have brought the curse of God on ourselves. We cannot pay to remove that debt! Jesus wanted to take our place! He wanted to pay the price for us. He was rejected and hated and put to death for us. We also tend to treat him with less than awe. We take his sacrifice for granted and ignore his words. Despite the humiliation, Jesus did not quit. "He was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that we, through his poverty, might become rich."

Jesus did not just sample the edges of humility. He went all the way. He didn't just wear a mask to put on a show, but he humbled himself and "became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross." He didn't stop when it hurt. He didn't drop out when it was tough. Even when it cost him his life in a slow and painful way, he stayed.

He willingly, even eagerly, humbled himself to set us free from sin and death. His attitude was this: determined to redeem sinners.

If we are to imitate Jesus' attitude, there is no room for pride in our hearts. We tend to complain about the small troubles we face, the pains and embarrassments and the way people have hurt our feelings. All that is a distraction! With a single-minded focus on Jesus we see the Savior who rescued us from Hell! He humbled himself to redeem us. He bore the curse of God for us. Death has no power; Satan has been defeated because Jesus endured. Jesus suffered. Jesus died. Focus on him!

Our attitude will be more like that of Christ Jesus as he is the object of a single-minded focus. He is our Redeemer. We will turn away from the sins that ensnare us. We will trust that Jesus forgives us. Aren't we baptized into Christ? Martin Luther puts it this way in his explanation of the Second Article: "All this he did that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."

On Palm Sunday, as Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem, the specter of death and suffering seems far away. I am sure the disciples weren't thinking that by Friday they would be mourning Jesus' death. Yet we know what happens the rest of this week. We do not shrink away from the agony of Good Friday. Jesus had to be humbled and to die for our salvation, but that was not the end. We will face humiliation and hardship and even death for our Christian faith, but there is more. Jesus was exalted to assure us that we are redeemed. We have peace with God! With confident certainty we keep a single-minded focus on Jesus.

Paul takes us from the sadness of Good Friday to the gladness of Easter with one word: "Therefore." Because Jesus paid the price for all sin by his death on the cross, "therefore, God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name." If there was anything of our salvation left undone, Jesus would have had to stay in the tomb; his payment would not have been enough. But Jesus the God-man fully kept the law. He paid the debt completely. Death has been swallowed up in victory, and Jesus has been lifted up. He is risen from the dead. Hosanna!

Since Jesus is exalted, his name is the name that is above every name. Peter proclaims: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." When we call ourselves Christian, his name stands in place of ours. God accepted his payment on our behalf. The Father credits his holiness to our account. His name saves us who have been baptized.

Look! A distraction! What is it that takes your single-minded focus away from Jesus? Is it the cute baby that got baptized today? Or, the awesome spectacle on the last day when every knee will bow before Jesus? Or, is it the discrepancy between the way things ought to be and the way they are? At every turn is the opportunity to look at ourselves, to see what we are doing, to ponder what we feel and what we desire. But don't be distracted. Have a single-minded focus on Jesus.

Jesus is exalted to assure us that we are redeemed. When you doubt whether death is defeated, you see Jesus risen from death. When you wonder if it is worth it to endure hardship and carry your own crosses, look to the Last Day, when Jesus will come again in glory. Then there will be no question about Jesus the Redeemer: "At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

On the Last Day, everyone will have a single-minded focus on Jesus, confessing that he is the Lord God. For those who rejected him, their confession will be for condemnation. For those who trusted him it will be a joyful acclamation. Do you see the singular importance of focusing on Jesus? He is exalted so you are absolutely certain that you have eternal life!

Our worship this week helps us keep the focus on Jesus. Today he enters Jerusalem amid the shouts of the crowds. The Lord has come to save. Hosanna! On Maundy Thursday Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion, giving us personal assurance of his forgiveness. We observe Good Friday, the day Jesus sacrificed himself in our place to pay for our sins. Such love he has for us! On Easter Sunday Jesus rose to proclaim our victory. These great events of our salvation present us with a single-minded focus on Jesus our Redeemer.

Distractions are always vying for our attention. Often, our attitude sinks into sinfulness. Our actions don't always reflect our status as baptized children of God. We are not like Jesus, not in attitude or in anything else. So we don't focus on ourselves. Look at Jesus. He was humbled to redeem us. The price is paid in full, and he set us free from sin and death! Jesus was exalted to assure us we are redeemed. Not even death stands in the way of life with him forever! God gives us a new attitude, one that is determined and focused: We live in repentance for our sin. We live trusting Jesus has forgiven us. A single-minded focus on Jesus. Hosanna! Praise God who gives us the boldness to confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." SDG Amen.