

Palm Sunday/ Sunday of the Passion

March 24, 2024

QUESNEL

“How Do You View Jesus?” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

- Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
 - Behold, your king is coming to you;
 - righteous and having salvation is He,
 - humble and mounted on a donkey,
 - on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
- “On the foal of a donkey”:
 - I thought about that phrase,
 - and then I thought about the fact that this is a foolish idea.

But this is Palm Sunday,

- the Sunday of the Passion,
 - and so I do want to talk to you today about “fools.”
 - With April Fool’s Day coming up a week from tomorrow
 - My question is,
 - “Who Are the April Fools following
 - the day after Easter?”
- Are we?
 - Are we fools for believing in,
 - worshiping,
 - and setting our hopes on,
 - a man who rides into Jerusalem as a king
 - but ends up dying on a cross?
- There are lots of folks who would say we are.
 - They think we are absolute fools
 - for falling for this old story
 - about some crucified would-be king.
- So it comes back to the question,
 - “How Do You View Jesus?”

Many say, if you believe in a crucified king,

- you must be fools.

- But then, this is nothing new.
 - St. Paul got the same reaction
 - as he went about preaching Christ crucified.
- Listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25:
 - *“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,*
 - *but to us who are being saved*
 - *it is the power of God.*
- *For it is written,*
 - *‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,*
 - *and the discernment of the discerning*
 - *I will thwart.’*
 - *Where is the one who is wise?*
 - *Where is the scribe?*
 - *Where is the debater of this age?*
 - *Has not God made foolish*
 - *the wisdom of the world?*
 - *For since, in the wisdom of God,*
 - *the world did not know God through wisdom,*
 - *it pleased God through the folly*
 - *of what we preach*
 - *to save those who believe.*
 - *For Jews demand signs*
 - *and Greeks seek wisdom,*
 - *but we preach Christ crucified,*
 - *a stumbling block to Jews*
 - *and folly to Gentiles,*
 - *but to those who are called,*
 - *both Jews and Greeks,*
 - *Christ the power of God*
 - *and the wisdom of God.*
 - *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men,*
 - *and the weakness of God*
 - *is stronger than men.”*

The word of the cross is foolishness to the people of this world.

- They think we Christians are the biggest fools around
 - for making such a big deal
 - about this man Jesus dying on the cross
 - which we do all the time
 - but never more heavily than we do this week,

- what with the reading of the Passion account
 - Good Friday service.
- Why such an emphasis on Jesus' suffering and death?
 - Are not you being a bit morbid?
 - So they think.

Last year, around this time,

- there was a knock at the door,
 - and I answered it,
 - and a man and woman were there,
 - handing me a tract
 - and inviting me to a special event coming up.
- On the front of this tract you could see the questions:
 - “How Do You View Jesus?
 - As a Newborn Baby?
 - A Dying Man?
 - Or an Exalted King?”
- And there are pictures there to go with it:
 - Jesus as a baby,
 - Jesus as He is dying,
 - and Jesus as a king.
- Then below the pictures was the invitation:
 - “You Are Invited to Hear the Answer Thursday, April 6, 2023.”
 - Then I opened up the tract, and it says:
 - “Jesus is now reigning as an exalted King.
 - But what does this mean for you?
- Many believe that Jesus died for them.
 - Yet, how can one man's death almost 2,000 years ago
 - mean life for others today?”
 - The people at my door,
 - as you may have guessed,
 - were Jehovah's Witnesses,
 - and the tract they gave me
 - was from their Watchtower Society.
 - So how do we respond to their questions?
 - I am going to ask you to think it through
 - along with me.

“How Do You View Jesus?”

- As a Newborn Baby?
 - A Dying Man?
 - Or an Exalted King?”
- My first reaction is,
 - “What, is this a multiple-choice question?
 - I only get to pick one?”
 - Because my answer would be,
 - “D. All of the above.”
 - “Newborn Baby,” check.
 - “Dying Man,” check.
 - “Exalted King,” check.
- They are all true.
 - And you cannot have one without the other.
 - You have got to have all of them right,
 - and not pit one against the other,
 - in order to have the Jesus of the Bible,
 - the only Saviour of sinners.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses do not get any of these views of Jesus right,

- and they do not keep them together.
 - The implication of their tract
 - is that you should not get hung up on Jesus
 - as a newborn baby,
 - like at Christmas,
 - or on Jesus as a dying man,
 - like during this Holy Week,
 - but instead you should focus on Jesus
 - as the exalted king.

Now, is Jesus the exalted king?

- Yes, He is! No doubt about that.
 - And even the picture of Jesus
 - they have on their tract
 - does have some truth behind it.
 - If you could see it in color,
 - You would see a Jesus with white hair
 - and fiery eyes,
 - wearing a white robe with a golden sash.
 - And that image does resemble the description

- of our exalted Lord that John gives us in Revelation 1, as follows:
 - *“I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me,*
 - *and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,*
 - *and in the midst of the lampstands one like a Son of Man,*
 - *clothed with a long robe*
 - *and with a golden sash*
 - *around His chest.*
- *The hairs of His head were white,*
 - *like white wool, like snow.*
 - *His eyes were like a flame of fire,*
 - *His feet were like burnished bronze,*
 - *refined in a furnace,*
 - *and His voice was like*
 - *the roar of many waters.*
- *In his right hand He held seven stars,*
 - *from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword,*
 - *and His face was like the sun*
 - *shining in full strength.”*

Jesus as a glorious, exalted king.

- And so He is.
 - But the Jehovah’s Witnesses conveniently leave out other images of Jesus
 - that we find in the Book of Revelation,
 - especially that of Jesus as “the Lamb who was slain,”
 - who by His blood has redeemed us sinners.
 - That part they leave out.
 - But again, you cannot have one
 - without the other.

No, you’ve got to keep all of these views together to have the real Jesus.

- Even the “newborn baby” the JW’s get wrong.
 - They do not believe that the Christ of Christmas
 - is the incarnate Son of God,
 - God in the flesh.
- The Jehovah’s Witnesses would not be able to confess
 - what you just confessed in the Nicene Creed,
 - namely,
 - that the Lord Jesus Christ is
 - “the only-begotten Son of God,

- begotten of His Father before all worlds,
 - God of God,
 - Light of Light,
 - very God of very God,
 - begotten, not made,
 - being of one substance with the Father,
 - by whom all things were made.”
- The JW’s have revived the old Arian heresy
 - from the fourth century,
 - that Jesus is just a created being
 - at most “a” god, small “g,”
 - but not true God in His nature.

But most certainly He is.

- And there is no salvation,
 - for you or for anyone else,
 - without Jesus being precisely that,
 - that is,
 - the Son of God incarnate.
- Only God in the flesh could rescue us from our predicament,
 - from the sin and death
 - in which we were trapped.

But people do not want to believe that,

- that our situation was so bad
 - that I am so bad of a sinner
 - that I cannot save myself by my own efforts,
 - that it took the death of the very Son of God
 - to save me and to give me life.
 - This is insulting to our pride.
- We think we are good enough on our own,
 - that if we try hard enough and are good enough,
 - we can work our way into heaven.
 - That is what the Jehovah’s Witnesses believe,
 - and that is what they try to do.
- From God’s perspective, this kind of thinking represents the real fools,
 - because they are rejecting the one and only Saviour
 - that God has sent.

It is not just the JW’s, though, who think they don’t need a crucified Saviour.

- This proud instinct comes naturally to us all.
 - It is part of our sinful nature,
 - part of our blindness and arrogance,
 - to think I do not need Jesus,
 - God's Son,
 - dying on a cross to save me.
- It is the reason people do not come to church.
 - It is because they think they do not need Jesus that much.
 - They do not need what Christ has to offer them here,
 - they do not need His life-giving Word,
 - they do not need His ongoing forgiveness,
 - they do not need to be a part of Christ's family,
 - the church.
 - But that too is foolish thinking.

But now do not stop with the Jehovah's Witnesses

- and the people who do not come to church.
 - What about us?
 - How tightly are you and I clinging to Christ and His cross?
 - Not that much?
 - Then we are the fools.
 - I have been given reason
 - to think a lot about this of later.
- ?In our daily lives,
 - in the way we act and speak and think,
 - is the word of the Lord
 - always making the big difference
 - in our decisions?
- Are we recognizing our sins
 - and our need for forgiveness
 - and our need for God's help in holy living?
 - If not, we are diminishing what Christ did for us
 - on the cross,
 - and that is real folly.

As you realize more keenly the ways in which you have diminished

- and downplayed the role of Christ in your life,
 - as you honestly feel that sinfulness in your soul,
 - now come to Christ your Saviour

- and receive His full and freeing forgiveness.
- Be refreshed by His grace,
 - which cleanses you like a spring rain
 - and causes the new life within you to flower and grow.
 - God is good,
 - God is gracious,
 - and He forgives you today for Christ's sake
 - and renews your spirit.

“How can one man's death almost 2,000 years ago mean life for others today?”

- It may seem like foolishness to the Jehovah's Witnesses,
 - and foolishness to the world,
 - but to us who are being saved
 - the word of the cross
 - is the power of God.
- “How can one man's death almost 2,000 years ago mean life for others today?”
 - It can, and does,
 - when that man is Jesus Christ,
 - the holy Son of God.

Dear friends,

- these three things all go together,
 - and thank God they do:
 - Newborn Baby,
 - Dying Man,
 - Exalted King.
- The newborn baby of Christmas
 - is Jesus Christ,
 - the eternal Son of God
 - come in the flesh to live and die
 - as the Saviour of the world.
- This same Jesus went to the cross,
 - the dying man who died in the place of all sinners
 - who died in your place,
 - shedding His holy blood
 - to redeem you from sin, Satan, death, and hell,
 - so that now you can look forward in sure hope
 - to “the resurrection of the dead

- and the life of the world to come.”

“How do you view Jesus?”

- View Him this week especially as the Dying Man,
 - suffering and dying on the cross
 - for the sins of the world.
- Never be ashamed of viewing Him as such,
 - for there is salvation in no other.
 - Yes, He is risen from the dead,
 - as we will celebrate next Sunday.
- And now this same Jesus
 - is ruling all things as the Exalted King,
 - and we who trust in Him will live forever in His kingdom.
- But “*God has highly exalted him*”
 - precisely because
 - “*he humbled Himself*”
 - *by becoming obedient to the point of death,*
 - *even death on a cross.*”

“How do you view Jesus?”

- In faith, and with great joy!
 - Newborn Baby,
 - Dying Man,
 - Exalted King:
 - one Lord Jesus Christ,
 - the Saviour of us all.

AMEN

This sermon was prepared for the Divine Service at Trinity Lutheran Church, Quesnel, BC and was presented on March 24, 2024, the day we celebrated Palm Sunday. If you have questions or comments please feel free to call or text Pastor Alan Visser at (250) 552-4685.