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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
March 25, 2018  
Palm Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 53:7-12, Mark 11:1-10

Hymns: 160; 162; 725; 161:3 (244:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 12:18-24

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, <sup>19</sup>and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. <sup>20</sup>(For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." <sup>21</sup>And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")

<sup>22</sup>But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, <sup>23</sup>to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, <sup>24</sup>to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our crucified Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: The Story of Palm Sunday

What is Palm Sunday all about? I think we are all well aware of the Biblical account of what happened on that day. We know how Jesus sent His disciples to fetch a donkey and her foal upon which no had ridden, and that part is significant, that Jesus rode that foal of a donkey upon which no one else had ever ridden. We know how the crowds on the road making their way to Jerusalem for the feast of unleavened bread grew as they approached the city. We know how the people began to call out their hosannas, and waved the palm branches in Jesus' honor, and laid them on the ground before Jesus,. Some men even took off their outer cloaks and laid them on the ground before the Lord. All these things were done to honor Jesus.

Now, this begs the question, "Why honor Jesus?" Not everyone would have given the same answer. Some honored Him because they perceived that He was a prophet. A good many honored Jesus because they had heard of the recent miracle in which He raised Lazarus of Bethany from the dead. Some asked who this was, and simply joined the crowd in singing hosanna. The crowds of people gathered along the road that day did not comprehend what Jesus was really all about, who He really was, and what He was going to accomplish a few days later in His death upon the cross.

Why honor Jesus? Because God the Father determined that Jesus should be so honored with a triumphant entry into the capital city of Jerusalem. He was received as a King, as the King He was and still is! He was to be received as the Victor over the forces of evil, the forces of the devil He was yet to destroy.

While the crowds and even the disciples did not realize all that was to happen, Jesus did. He knew it all; all that He would endure, all that was required of Him to gain salvation for us, and Jesus went forward to Jerusalem. Jesus went forward to engage the enemy. Jesus went forward to suffer and die. And so WE honor Him each and every Palm Sunday for the courage He possessed to suffer and die, for such a worm as I.

Our text leads us to appreciate how Jesus made it possible for us to approach God. And so in this final Sunday Lenten meditation we --

**THEME: Look to Jesus Who Endured the Cross;**

## **He Is Our Courage.**

How should one go about approaching God? Where does one find the courage to do so? The writer to the Hebrew Christians breaks it down to two possible choices. The first choice is scary, actually more than scary. Consider --

### **I. The Terror of Approaching God through Sinai.**

Yes, our text makes approaching God a choice of two mountains. The inspired writer did this for the Hebrew Christians because they could identify with these two mountains very well. Mentioning Sinai brought to mind and heart the giving of the law. The image that comes to our mind is probably Moses holding the two tablets of stone, but that is only a very small part of what happened there. The entire scene was terrifying. There was fire and smoke, and the absolute threat of death to any one, man or beast, that would so much as touch the holy mountain. Then there was the mighty sound of trumpets; and God spoke, out loud in the hearing of the people, and they were all so afraid they couldn't stand it. This was knee knocking terror! They begged Moses to intercede, that Moses would speak with God and then report to them what the Lord had said. And yes, the law was full of the threats of punishment. While it said, "This do and you will live," it also said "the soul that sins shall die!" That is exactly what these Jewish Christians understood from their Bible history lessons. Approaching God by climbing Mount Sinai was and remains a terrifying prospect.

So then why would anyone suggest that one might come to God through the observance of the law, either moral or ceremonial? That was the prospect of returning to Judaism. And yet as much as that was the temptation that confronted those early Jewish Christians, it remains the temptation for many today, and again many who regard themselves as Christians. Many are tempted, indeed many are deceived into thinking that if they are good enough, if they sacrifice enough, if they live an austere life, then God will be pleased with them and accept that austere lifestyle as righteousness. Others feel if they go through the outward motions of worship and devotion that will cover their sinful lives, and they can continue sinning without a care.

All this is folly for it is nothing more than going to God through Sinai. That is terrifying, and it should be. How can anyone find the courage to approach God through Sinai? Knowing the Scriptures we should know better. Paul writes plainly enough for any and all to understand in his epistle to the Romans.

**Romans 3:19-20** “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.<sup>20</sup> Therefore **by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.**”

Observance of the law, honest evaluation of oneself in light of the law does not bring one courage to come before the throne of the Judge of all mankind, for by the law is not the knowledge of righteousness, but the knowledge of sin, and the horror of standing before an angry God. “Our God is a consuming fire!” (Hebrews 12:29)

Now remember this is Palm Sunday, and we are observing Jesus riding on the foal of a donkey approaching Jerusalem, ascending the heights of Mount Zion. Our text would relate to us –

## **II. The Assurance of Approaching God through Zion.**

What a difference in the nature of this scene! Sinai was “so terrifying ... *that* Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.” (v.21)

**Hebrews 12:22-24** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,<sup>23</sup> to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,<sup>24</sup> to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

What an amazingly different picture is presented for approaching God through Zion! Instead of fire and lightening and smoke and terror, we find the living God with the host of heaven. We are told of innumerable angels, who are there to serve the saints of God on

earth, and the general assembly and church or gathering of the firstborn. These are all those who have been received to heaven already before us. It's a picture of life, everlasting **LIFE!** These are registered in the Book of Life and approaching the Judge of all with no fear. On Zion one finds the spirits of just men made complete or perfect.

How did this happen? How can this be a scene of people standing before the Judge and there is no terror? Because also present there when one approaches God through Zion is Jesus. Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant of the law which demands perfect obedience, but the New Covenant in which Jesus presents His perfect fulfillment of the law in our place, to our credit. Zion is where Jesus went on that Palm Sunday to present Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the people, for the sins of the world. The sprinkling of the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. (1John 1:7) That is what the ceremonial law foreshadowed, and it found its fulfillment in Christ, our crucified Savior. And God's wrath has been turned aside forevermore. Our text declares that Jesus' blood speaks far better things than the blood of Abel.

“Glory be to Jesus Who in bitter pains  
Poured for me the lifeblood From His sacred veins.

“Grace and life eternal In that blood I find.  
Blest be His compassion, Infinitely kind.

“Abel's blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies,  
But the blood of Jesus For our pardon cries.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 158: 1,2,4)

Again even as Paul wrote of the terror that the law must convey because it cannot bring righteousness, so he also wrote in that same section of Romans of how God secured a real and perfect righteousness which He presents to us in Jesus.

**Romans 3:21-22a** “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,  
<sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ”

This righteousness which comes to us from God was already written about by Moses and the prophets, and it is fulfilled for us in Jesus, who endured the cross. On Palm Sunday Jesus rode that foal of a donkey as the King of our salvation. He rode that little donkey and all the people cried out “Hosanna, Save now we pray!” for the coming of the Redeemer King into Jerusalem. By week’s end that salvation would be secured, and righteousness won, and the devil defeated, and God’s wrath forever assuaged. The courage Jesus possessed to go forth to such a battle, to such an ordeal is worthy of our meditation, but it shall never be fully comprehended. However, the courage He grants us to approach God through Zion shall fill our hearts with peace and joy forevermore.

How shall it be on that Day when we are called to stand before the Judge of all?

“Bold shall I stand in that great Day,  
For who aught to my charge shall lay?  
Fully thro’ these absolved I am  
From sin and fear, From guilt and shame.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 371:2)

And so it shall be, for we keep looking to Jesus who endured the Cross: He is our courage!

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)