

2 April 2023
Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Fear Not”

Text: John 12:12-19; Matthew 26-27

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

Fear not.

We heard those words at the beginning of the service this morning, in the Palm Sunday Gospel. It was a quote from the prophet Zechariah, that the Lord was coming to set things right. So ***fear not***. With the Lord there is hope.

The Son of God had come in fulfillment of that prophecy, and now was entering Jerusalem to set things right - not with Rome, but with God. Not to overthrow of foreign oppression, but overthrow of sin. Not for a time, but for eternity.

Jesus enters with the people crying out ***Hosanna***, which means *save us*! And He will. By not saving Himself. By allowing Himself to be arrested, by not returning the taunts and mockery, by laying down His life for the life of the world. If there be any hope for this world and for us, for the past, present, and future, it would all spring from this week. This Holy Week. The week of *our* holiness, when our holiness was accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus. *For God so loved the world* (John 3:16). For God so loved you.

So that we ***fear not***.

Which is a tall order, is it not? For the things to fear in our world and in our lives are legion.

We've seen the images, the videos of devastation from tornadoes, fires, floods, train derailments, and more. And even if we're not around those, others are. Maybe loved ones are. And we fear.

When will the next shooting take place in a school, church, mall, theatre, or workplace? No one ever expects them to happen where they are, but they do. And we fear.

Science is wonderful. How many modern marvels have enhanced our lives in just the past few years? And yet science can be frightening as well, with the engineering of viruses, new and stronger drugs being manufactured and taking lives, to now, we're being told, of

the dangers of AI.

There has always been crime and violence, but with less law enforcement it seems to be increasing. And it's often so random - from people being pushed off subway platforms, to email and texting scams, identity theft, road rage, and more. And we fear.

What about hostile nations? What are Russia, China, North Korea, Iran doing? What are they planning? More war? Expanded war? Will nuclear weapons be used? Will my children have to fight? And we fear.

And then what about you personally? The fear of a loved one leaving or dying, the fear of your sin or failure being found out, the fear of disease and dying.

And all these things, all at once. ***Fear not*** is easier said than done.

So we, too, sing ***Hosanna!*** *Save us!* And rightly so! For to paraphrase St. Paul, who else can rescue us? Who else can save us? Who else is greater than all these things? All these powers, all these messes, all these dangers? *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Romans 7:25)

Thanks be to God *for this week.*

For this is the week of our **deliverance**. Our deliverance from the sin which condemns us. Our deliverance from death, which wants to consume us. And our deliverance from the devil, who wants to drag us down to hell with him.

Our deliverance from the evil in our world. Our deliverance from a world which is out of joint and sometimes wreaks uncontrollable havoc. Our deliverance from the violence and selfishness of others.

And so this is the week also of our **hope**. Not a wishful and uncertain hope, but a strong and certain hope, that what God has promised, He will deliver. That what God gives cannot be taken away. We have the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins, that we will not be shamed before God. We have the assurance of victory over the devil. He can rant and rage, threaten and rise up against us, but he will not and can not drag us down to hell with him. We do not belong to him, but to our Saviour. And we have the assurance of life, that *though we die, yet shall we live* (John 11:25). That death will be like sleep for us, for all who are in Christ Jesus. That falling asleep in death now, we will wake up in Paradise for eternity.

Because of this week. Holy Week.

This week, our glorification is assured, because Jesus was glorified on the cross. For

there, on the cross, is the glory of His mercy and love for all to see. That though He was the perfect Son of God, He came down from heaven to take upon Himself our sins and be crucified as a sinful son of man. That though He could have saved Himself, He wanted to save you more. That though no man, soldier, betrayer, centurion, or Roman governor had *any* power over Him, He allowed this that we're about to hear once again, happen.

That while the sin, death, violence, evil, catastrophe, and hate in our world is legion, we can ***fear not***.

Not because our faith is so strong, but because the one our faith is in is so strong. Because He has done it. He endured the cross, He lay in the tomb, and He came out alive and victorious.

And the faith in Him we need is the faith He is giving and working in us as He enters our lives today not on a donkey, but in the water of Baptism, in the words of the Gospel, in the proclamation of the Absolution, and in the bread and wine of His Supper. As unlikely and unexpected as His entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey might have been, so here, too, in these ordinary and unexpected ways. And yet there He is, and here He is. There for you, and here for you. That you live. That you be His son or daughter. Not that you be happy necessarily, but that you be blessed. But that whatever comes in your life or in the world, you not be paralyzed in fear but live in the freedom of His love. That you ***fear not***.

So let us hear the story again, today, now, and all this week. Let it sink in, ponder it, marinate in it. That this truth of all that Jesus has done for you fill you with confidence and joy, and give you the strength to confess the hope that you have even in the face sin, death, and hell. You've heard this story before, but we need to hear it again. And again and again. That we not just hear what the world has to say, its catechesis, and all the bad news that bombards us every day. But that we hear this story, this news, the good news. That in Jesus, the victory is yours. In Jesus, you are forgiven. In Jesus, you have life. ***Fear not***.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.