

20 March 2005
Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Our Beast of Burden”

Text: Matthew 21:1-9 (Phil 2:5-11; Mt 27:11-54)

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

The first reading from God’s Word that you heard today spoke of Jesus *entering* Jerusalem, riding on a beast of burden. The last reading from God’s Word that you heard spoke of Jesus *leaving* Jerusalem – no longer riding a beast of burden, but having *become* a beast of burden. And I am not referring to the carrying of His cross. As we heard, they found another man to do that, namely one Simon of Cyrene. No, He leaves Jerusalem carrying the weight of the sins of the world. And there was no other man to do that, who *could* do that. Only one. Jesus. *God’s beast of burden.*

The first reading that you heard today spoke of Jesus *entering* Jerusalem, greeted by the cries and shouts of **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest.”** The last reading that you heard spoke of Jesus *leaving* Jerusalem – this time to cries and shouts of **“Crucify Him!”** Crucify Him because He claimed to be the Son of David, the Messiah. Crucify Him because He claimed to come in the name of the Lord. Crucify Him. . . . But actually, the shouts are the same. *For crucify fulfills hosanna.* For the “Hosanna!” which means *“save us!”* Jesus does by going to the cross; by suffering and not saving Himself; by being God’s beast of burden. Trusting in His Father, even when forsaken; even when the sin and guilt of the world crushed Him; even when He bows His head in death.

Yet even with those differences, both readings ended the same way. Yes, the same. With a confession of faith. The crowds confess Jesus as the promised Messiah, the promised **“Son of David”** as He enters Jerusalem; and the Roman centurion at the end confesses Jesus as the **“Son of God”** outside Jerusalem. Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God; God’s anointed and God’s beast of burden.

That is what we are called on to remember this week, and to confess this week. The story that we heard today and will hear this week is not just the story of Jesus’ crucifixion – a nice historical event that has a happy ending and makes for a good movie! *No, it is the story of our life.* The story of our sin and guilt, and what we because of our sin and guilt

deserve ourselves, and how we who are dead in our trespasses and sins, can live. **For we have a beast of burden, who carries our sins away, and who carries us to life.**

Now that *sounds bad*, doesn't it? *Calling Jesus a "beast of burden?"* So disrespectful. Some would probably object. For is it not better to worship Him, and praise Him, and glorify Him, and lift Him up?! Lift His name on high! . . . Well, I suppose it's not wrong to do any of those things. But hear the Word of God! What does it tell us today? It shows us Jesus as our beast of burden. You may not like that name, but there it is! And He comes not to be lifted up by us, **but to be lifted up on the cross.**

For if He is not your beast of burden, carrying your sins, you cannot worship Him. You cannot worship Him rightly. For to worship Him rightly is to have Him bear your sins.

And if He is not your beast of burden, then you must be your own. If your sins are not on Him, then your sins are still on you, and you are lost. Because you cannot carry them. They are too heavy for you. They are too much.

And if He is not your beast of burden, then you have no life in you. No true life, eternal life. For still today He comes to you not to be served, but to serve. To serve you. To lay down His life for you. To carry you. To carry the guilt of your sin. To carry your shame and punishment. To carry you in His nail-pierced hands, on His whipped and shredded back, as your Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. To carry you in life and in death, and *through* death to life eternal – to carry you not into the old Jerusalem, but into the new Jerusalem, the Heavenly Jerusalem.

He is your beast of burden. That is what we see this week, and that is what it means to confess Christ. That is our confession of faith. That we point to Him as the crucified one. The Lamb of God sacrificed for us. The Scapegoat upon whom all our sins are laid. ***"The One who made Himself nothing . . ."***

He is your *willing* beast of burden. For this is what He *wants* to do, and how He *wants* to be considered. His is no forced service, under crack of whip and driven to the cross. Although He did indeed fall under the whip, it was not needed – **He would have gone anyway.** For His love *compelled* Him, His mercy *drove* Him, and His compassion *kept* Him there. For us. He dies that we might live. He is bound that we might be free. That free from our burdens of sins, death, and the devil – and all the other problems and worries and anxieties they bring! – that free from our burdens, we would be free to live. Not only in His kingdom which has no end, but already here and now.

And with this in mind Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians: ***"Have this mind among***

yourselves.” Which I think he means in two ways. First and foremost is the mind of seeing Jesus as your servant, your beast of burden, **“who did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant . . . and humbl[ing] himself . . . to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** Have this mind among yourselves. This confession of faith. That Jesus is your beast of burden. . . . But also secondly, **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”** And so think of not only Jesus in this way, but also yourself. Think not only of Jesus’ life in this way, but also of your life! For His life is now yours. And so having been freed from your burdens, you are now free to bear one another’s burdens. Having been forgiven, you are now free to forgive. Having been loved, you are now free to love. Having been served by your Saviour, you are now free to serve. And what a wondrous and joyous thing that is – to serve, *not because you have to, but because you can.* And this is what we prayed for in the Collect of the Day – that we might have this mind among us, in both ways. The mind of Christ.

Perhaps a good example of this is when you inherit a really large sum of money from a rich relative. When that happens, you have all the money you need for the rest of your life, you no longer have to work, and you can give money away and help all those people you’ve wanted to help before! *Not because you have to, but because you can!* Because you were loved and given such a precious treasure. . . . But do you see? That’s exactly what’s happened to us! We have been given the inheritance of the Son of God! When He took our place, when He became our beast of burden, He gave us His place, His kingdom, His inheritance. And so we have all that we need for the rest of our lives – here and into eternity! We don’t have to work for forgiveness, or Heaven, or salvation, or God’s favor, because it has already been given to us! When Jesus died, His last will and testament went into effect. And it’s yours. And so as a result we are inheritors, and we are free – free to love, to forgive, to serve, to have the mind of Christ . . . in *both* ways. Confessing Him with both our mouths and our lives.

And how do you know that’s all yours? You know it because you will again receive that testament today; the New Testament, put into effect when Jesus died; the New Testament in His blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Here you will again receive the inheritance. Here you will again receive the pledge and seal of His favor. Here you will again be served by your beast of burden, as Jesus serves you with His very body and blood, to give you life and freedom. For as our Saviour Himself told us: **“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”** (John 6:54)

And so just as Jesus left Jerusalem quite differently than He entered, so we too will leave this place quite differently than we entered. Because what we enter with, our beast of

burden leaves with. Just as He did that week in Jerusalem. And so the burdens, the sins, the sorrows, the cares, the concerns, bring them all for He is here to take them all. And then, ***“let His blood be on you and on your children.”*** His blood of forgiveness. His blood of life. His blood of freedom. His blood that was shed in love for you. For our cries of *“Hosanna! Save us!”* are fulfilled with His crucifixion. His loving and all-sacrificing service for us on the cross. He went there for you and me. To be our beast of burden. And He didn’t consider it beneath Him, or too low a service for Him, or disrespectful to His Godhead in any way. On the contrary, it was exactly what a loving God would do. And so He did it. And is still doing it. Still coming to serve us. To take what is ours and give us what is His.

So how shall we welcome such a king? How do we rise to meet Him? We do so as we do every week, as our Saviour, our King, our beast of burden, comes to us – with the same song the crowds welcomed Him with so many years ago. Same Saviour, same forgiveness, same song: ***“Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”***

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.