

Jesu Juva

“The Story”

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

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

You just heard the story that all the Bible is about. This is not just part of the story, this is what it's all about. Take this story out and the Bible is just another holy book - teaching us what to do and how to be good. But with this story, the Bible becomes a wholly different book, and everything in it gains new meaning. Everything in the Bible must be understood through the lens of this story, or not be understood at all.

Now some would object to that, saying that is to impose on the Old Testament a meaning that is not there - or at least, not yet understood. But not understood is quite different than not there. For even if the people didn't always understand, God did. God knew what He was doing. And so even if they didn't realize, for example, that the bronze serpent on a pole in the wilderness that saved them from the deadly venom of the snakes that were biting them was a picture of what Jesus would do for us on the cross - it is still true. Even if they didn't realize that passing through the Red Sea was a picture of baptism, or the manna in the desert a picture of the Lord's Supper, or the sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac a picture of the sacrifice of God's Son Jesus - it is still true. God working everything toward this day, this story that we just heard. This story of the salvation of the world.

So perhaps we should not be surprised when we hear in John that *His disciples did not understand these things at first*. We should not be surprised when Pontius Pilate is confused, or the people are confused. For they wondered: *Can a king who doesn't act like a king be a king?* Or to phrase that in a way people today would say it: *can a God who doesn't act like God be God?*

But to think that way is to judge God by the way we think; what we expect of Him, and if He doesn't act the way we think He should, then deny Him. But to do that is to wind up with a God of your own making, which is to say, an idol. It is to have, therefore, no God at all.

For if you want to know God, you must know Him here, like this - a giving God, a dying God. This is how God wants to be known - quite different than all earthbound thoughts of power and glory and the way we think things ought to be. Here, with this story, we learn things not as we want them to be or how we think they should be, **but as they are**. Here we learn the seriousness of our sins - all of them, even those we think aren't so bad; even those we think aren't hurting anybody; even those we don't think should be sins. Here

they are. Every last one of them, on Jesus, on the cross, crushing Him, separating Him from the Father. But even more than that, we learn here just how great and deep and high and long and wide the love of God for you (Eph 3:18-19) - that He would do this for you. *All this, for you. The Father, for you. The Son, for you. The Holy Spirit, for you. Giving everything, for you.*

So it was as we heard at the beginning of the service, with the Palm Sunday reading. The people heard that Jesus was the Messiah, for He called Himself the Messiah, the Son of Man, and they kept waiting for Him to act like it. So they welcome Him like a king by waving palm branches and shouting *Hosanna! Save us!*

Jesus does not deny it - this was all true. He would be their King, their Messiah - just not the way they expected. So He begins the week on a donkey - not very regal or majestic, and He ends it on a cross and in a tomb - not very glorious or triumphant . . . by earthbound standards. But here, Jesus was doing what Jesus always did: give. Just as He gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf; just as He gave cleansing to the lepers and legs to the lame; just as He gave freedom to the possessed and forgiveness to the sinner; so now He gives His life for the life of the world. He gives His life *to fulfill* all these other gifts. For only through His death and resurrection will all these gifts really matter. Without that, these are all only temporary gifts, earthbound, until death and the grave claims its prey. But with Jesus' death and resurrection, all these are pictures of the new life Jesus has come to give, by giving His own life for yours. This story giving new meaning to all stories.

And to your story as well! Though you too may not always understand, God is working in you to make this story your story; to give new meaning to your story. That you see what happens in your life not as an accidental string of meaningless and disconnected coincidences, *all sound and fury* in the end *signifying nothing* - but as the work of God for you. God working in you. Not just God giving you the stuff of this world - that's not enough, and on the day you die *won't matter*. He is working, rather, *that you believe*. Believe that you have a God who loves you, who died for you, and who is giving you life not just earthbound, but eternal.

And so to know God is to know Him here: God on the cross, God for you. And to know Him here is to know *yourself*: a precious child of God: of the Father, who gave His Son for you; of the Son, your brother Jesus who died for you; and of the Holy Spirit, who proclaims this truth, joins you to it, and gives you the faith to believe it.

And so in the liturgy in just a moment, you will hear the call: *lift up your hearts*. That used to be shorter; just: *hearts up!* It is the call to lift up your hearts from the earthbound - from earthbound troubles, from earthbound thoughts of glory and power and the way you think things should be, and fix them on Jesus. On Jesus, who gave Himself for you on the cross, and now on Jesus who gives Himself to you in this Supper, in His Body and

Blood. And though you do not understand how, you *do* know why: to make His death and resurrection yours, to make His life yours, in the forgiveness of your sins. For that's what this story, that's what the Bible, is all about: our life with God, broken by sin, restored by Jesus.

So whatever is happening in your life now - be it joy or sorrow, be it ease or challenge, be it trial or glory - view it all through the lens of this story. Then you will see it aright. Then you will see to not lust after the earthbound glory or ease or joy, nor despair in the sorrow or challenge or trial, but know that through it all, God is working, in you. To make you His own, to keep you as His own, and to bring you to His kingdom. And through the lens of this story then to trust that God knows what He's doing. Even if it doesn't seem that way to you, even if you don't understand. The cross and resurrection of Jesus teaches us it is so. That so be fulfilled that for which we prayed earlier: That by His mercy *we may follow the example of His great humility and patience* - His great faith - *and be made partakers of His resurrection* (Collect of the Day). And not just in the end, but even now. Today. A new you. A new life. In Christ, our Saviour and King.

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