

Pentecost 6-July 9,2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Zechariah 9:9-12, Romans 7:15-25a, and Matthew 11:16-19,25-30

"Come to Me" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

In all of today's readings we learn about the interesting, maybe peculiar, if not outright strange ways that Jesus reveals his power and authority to us. His ways are so different from what we would expect and what we are used to in this world that when we hear about what Jesus did to show his power, we certainly don't understand what Jesus was thinking and fail to trust what Jesus is up to. But despite all our doubts, questions, and resistance, the good news for us is that Jesus does not give up on us or send us away despairing. Instead, he first prays and thanks God for what is hidden from us and then tells us what we need to hear, "Come to me and I will give you rest."

God the Father of the Old Testament and Jesus the Son of God in the New Testament have always needed to remind us of where we are to turn when we are in trouble. Our first instincts are that we need to figure out the mess we have gotten into for ourselves. This may be the advice given by some of your friends as well. Well-meaning friends might encourage you with words like "Just be strong" or "Hang in there, it will get better" or "Time will heal all your wounds." or even as a church changed the words of Jesus and promoted the idea "Let's pull together and get it done." The people that Jesus was talking too in our reading for today did not believe what John the Baptist said Jesus would do nor did they believe how Jesus would combat the enemies of this world, not with strength and power, but through weakness and suffering.

We get a foretaste of the peculiar way Jesus would defeat our enemies in the first reading from Zechariah for today. This reading might have sounded out of place today as this is the reading that is read on Palm Sunday every year as Jesus is processing into Jerusalem to be our king. Jesus comes into town much different from leaders such as the president of the United States would come to a town for a visit.

Before a president comes to even a small midwestern town like Sioux Falls, it is not uncommon for Secret Service agents to arrive and scope out the town three months in advance of the president's arrival. Then they make no secrets about a president coming to make sure that residents know that they will be watched, and all threats will be taken seriously. Bomb sniffing dogs go ahead of the president to make sure the path is clear. Hospitals in the towns that are visited by the president are notified and care is taken so that the president is within a 10-minute travel time in the case of a medical emergency. Quite often the president has an extra plane ready hidden somewhere if needed and a plan is in place to land in a secret location if an unexpected problem arises. There are more than just a few bodyguards close to the president to protect him. There often are a 1000 people involved to plan the arrival of a president into a town. You know that some person of power is in town just by all the highways and streets that are no longer open to the public while the president is in the area. Hotel workers that house the president are all required to have background checks taken and usually three floors of the hotel where the president stays are vacated when staying there. The rooms don't just get clean sheets and special shampoo in the bathrooms, but all rooms are carefully debugged of any electronic devices. Then a three-tiered perimeter of security surrounds the president made up of local police officers, the secret service and then closest to the president is the Presidential Protective Division. And if that wasn't enough, the president arrives with his own chefs to protect against the possibility of food poisoning.

Not so with Jesus. Jesus comes in on a donkey. No one is present to shield him from his enemies. Instead of building barriers to keep Jesus safe, Jesus removes all barriers from all people that would keep them at a safe distance and then Jesus says, "Come to me."

The reading from Zechariah took place when God's chosen people were just returning from their years of exile. They too were coming home and were looking forward to a powerful king that would defeat the enemies that had kept them in bondage. They would have been happy to see a king that would throw down

fire from heaven and burn their opposers to a crisp. The king that Zechariah prophesied was none other than Jesus who did not come into town on a powerful war horse but would come in riding on a young donkey. Then instead of building up a powerful army, this new king would de-fund the military by cutting off the production of battle bows. He will not form alliances with people who think alike but will declare peace to people and nations who were at odds with each other. There wouldn't be a need for any negotiations between countries to trade war prisoners because the new king would set all prisoners free from the prisons where they were severely mistreated. These prisoners of war would not be forgotten after the war was over but would be restored to having twice what they had before. What Zechariah prophesied did not set well with many of God's chosen people. They hoped that the authority of the new king would be marked with noticeable power rather than with the hidden weapon of forgiveness.

The reading from Romans today deserves its own sermon, but don't get nervous, I fit the highlights of this reading into this same sermon. Paul understood how imprisonment works. He put people behind bars, and he did some time of his own behind bars. But more than anything else, Paul was concerned with the bondage that his own sin had on him. Paul didn't consider himself a victim. Paul owned up to his own sins. No matter how hard he tried to do the right thing, the wrong thing is what he ended up doing. Paul realized that the key to being released from his bondage to sin was never going to be accomplished by his good behavior. His release would have to come from outside himself.

We sometimes think we have a handle on our sin. We feel our sins aren't that big and are manageable. We haven't taken someone's life. We haven't stolen our neighbor's car because we wanted it. We confess to having only one God, unless you count our family and why would God make a commandment about honoring father and mother if he didn't mind us placing family above him now and then. Or wasn't Paul dividing big sins from little sins? Was Paul proclaiming we do not have the will to do what is right from heinous crimes down to daily seemingly insignificant decisions? On Wednesday this week, I didn't pack lunch when I came to the office. We had plans for a bigger meal for supper, but I felt I should have and deserved to have something to eat before our evening meal. Since I had to go to Dells to pick up the Meals on Wheels to deliver, I decided to stop at Casey's and get one slice of pizza and a Zero Gatorade to hold me over. I guess a small bag of licorice also might have made it to the checkout counter too. But that wasn't a huge meal and I decided that was all I would have until supper. I know that I don't need much to eat, and I know what happens when I do. I know what to do and what not to do. Later when I visited Jimmie that afternoon, his family was on the deck of their house enjoying their dinner. They had a heaping full plate of deep red and what appeared to be juicy watermelon and sandwiches piled high with thin sliced pork loin and I noticed they had extra paper plates. I was offered a sandwich, but I turned it down because I had already eaten the slice of pizza and I wasn't going to have anything more. I agreed to have one slice of watermelon. And then with one more temptation, the pork loin sandwich came to me and disappeared. Like Paul, the very thing I said I wouldn't do, I did.

Paul had already realized that he was in bondage to sin, and he couldn't free himself. If he thought he could, he would have prayed, "Lord, help me to be stronger so I can do what I should." But Paul did ask for self-help. Paul knew that the solution for his bondage would only come from outside himself and that is why he cried out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Paul cried out for a person to help him, not to be given a new idea or a word of encouragement. Then Paul answered his own question. Thanks be to God through our Jesus Christ our Lord!

The sin that we carry often is our own doing, but we also can bear the burdens that other's place on our shoulders to carry. Jesus came into this world for you. Jesus calls to you today with these words of release and rescue. "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

You have come to Jesus today and given you rest from your sins and the burdens of this life. Jesus has taken your burdens from you and given you his easy yoke.

Amen