March 28/29, 2026
Palm Sunday
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church
Zechariah 9:9,10
The King is Coming! Rejoice and Shout!

Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Amen.

The excitement was palpable. The jubilation rose to new levels. The triumphant shouting caused some to cover their ears and glance around with confusing looks. Why was there all this joyful commotion? Palm branches lay everywhere. Even perfectly tailored cloaks served as a type of red carpet. Why such respect for someone riding on a donkey? One only needs to listen to the words reaching the heavens, words shouted by the crowd of people lining the streets, **"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"** (Matthew 21:9)

Jesus was entering Jerusalem. The one who healed the sick, who gave sight to the blind, who raised the dead, who went out of his way to help the helpless, this was the one entering Jerusalem, and the crowds welcomed him like the great celebrity he was in their hearts. What a joyful scene it was. And, this type of scene is exactly what Zechariah was urging the people in to create for themselves about 500 years earlier. He told the people, **"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!"** But, to follow through on Zechariah's words would be easier said than done by the people.

Zechariah ministered to a people who had returned from exile. Before the exile, God's chosen nation acted anything but his own people. Rebelling against him, serving fake gods, and pleasing their own wants and desires. God's people brought judgment upon themselves. God followed through on his warning to punish his people should they fall away from him. So, God's nation was taken into exile in Babylon.

But, now, they had returned to the Promised Land! Cyrus, king of Persia, issued an edict allowing the Jews to return to their prized possession: Jerusalem and its temple. There was a problem, however. The temple and the city didn't look the same. Much of it was a pile of rubble. Jerusalem and the beloved temple had been destroyed in the process of the exile. Rebuilding the city walls and the temple was taking a long time due to enemy opposition. This opposition brought fear and laziness upon the people. The people returning from exile returned with a vigorous hope. Soon, they would be living in the glory days gone by. Soon, everything would be back to normal. The years following the return proved otherwise. Their hopes and dreams didn't materialize, and the people became discouraged. So, imagine Zechariah urging *these* people, living in *those* conditions to rejoice greatly and to shout.

When God gives commands, there's always good reason to follow through on those commands. His commands aren't out-of-the-blue mandates to blindly obey. Think of God's command to Abraham to leave his homeland and comfort zone to go a foreign land unknown to him. Why would Abraham follow through on such an unsettling command? As Abraham obeyed, God promised to be with him and to bless him immensely. Think of the angel's command to the shepherds on Christmas Eve night: "Don't be afraid." How could the shepherds obey when the terrifying glory of the Lord shone around them? The angel brought good news of great joy. God doesn't give commands as some sort of power trip. There is blessing in following what he tells us to do.

What Zechariah was telling the people was really a command from God. That command was to be joyful. Rejoice greatly! Shout! Why? **"See, your king comes to you."** Even that by itself wasn't too much encouragement. A big reason the Jews were taken into exile was because their past kings were terrible. They led them into earthly and spiritual destruction. But, this was no ordinary king. They could trust *this* King.

What makes this King so great? What makes his coming so powerful that it could cause people living in such dreary circumstances to rejoice greatly and shout? This King is coming as one who is, "**righteous and having**

salvation." By telling the people this, Zechariah was saying that he will be perfect in all he does: how he will rule in their hearts, how he will love his people, how he will obey the ordinances laid out by the eternal God.

He will bring salvation with him as one who would win salvation by humbling himself to death in place of his own people. His Father would proclaim salvation for the world by raising his humble servant Son from the dead. This salvation would not guarantee a perfect life of fulfilled earthly hopes and dreams for the people. But, it would guarantee a perfect life forever in heaven.

Zechariah was saying, "See, you people, your promised King is coming! You can rejoice greatly and shout because even if life isn't great now, you know life will be perfect one day. And, that's reason enough to be happy and content right now because you have a certain future waiting for you. A future that will not leave you feeling unsatisfied nor unfulfilled."

Can we see ourselves in these Jews, the ones whom Zechariah commanded to rejoice and shout? Based on our calendars, we've made it through another winter. The grass is starting to green. Buds on tree limbs are noticeable. There's reason enough to be happy, some would say. But, there's always problems lurking or presently in our paths. It doesn't matter what year it is. There's always something.

The last time I preach on this text, it was right before our country shut down for Covid. People said, "Can't wait for 2021!" Well, 2021 came and Covid still lingered. There was also political turmoil and nasty wintry weather down south that killed hundreds. "Can't wait for 2022," was the theme. But, that year brought Russia invading Ukraine as well as severe inflation. You get the picture, right? I don't need to recap 2023-2026 so far. Every year there's something. Every year, we're tempted to say, "Can't wait for a new year to start over and to have reason for joy and happiness." That's a problem. Because, if that's our mentality, will we ever have enough reason to rejoice and shout?

And yet, there's still a greater, natural problem in all of us. How can we rejoice and shout when our sins still trouble us? More than waiting until next year for better worldly events, we can't wait until tomorrow to start fresh and attempt not to sin. Every day, we're reminded of our sinfulness because our sinfulness has brought such uncertain times upon us.

Not that everything horrific is a specific judgment from God, but every imperfect thing that happens is a general result of sin in the world ever since Adam and Eve. How can we rejoice greatly and shout when our own righteousness fails us again and when hopes and dreams of how 2026 was supposed to be have already fallen flat on their face?

"See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation." Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling these words of Zechariah. For 33 years, he was perfect in every single way, living a holy life in your place even when he encountered greater obstacles than what we currently face. For 33 years, he didn't make full use of his divine powers. Instead, as we heard from Philippians 2, **"he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant."** (Philippians 2:7) He showed his humility by also fulfilling the words that he would come to you as one **"gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."**

That humility proves to us that he was all in with God's plan of salvation. He lived like you and me, human beings relying on our heavenly Father. By living like us, he perfectly won salvation **"by humbling himself and becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross."** (Philippians 2:8) This is what the coming King did for you. You look to him for reason to obey the commands to rejoice greatly and to shout. You are still able to look to him because he lives. And because he lives, he still comes to you every day.

He comes as a powerful King, who rules all things and yet he comes in such a peaceful way just as he peacefully entered Jerusalem on a donkey. He doesn't rule with an iron fist. He doesn't rely on weapons of mass destruction to extend his rule. Rather, as God said through Zechariah, **"I will take away the chariots**

from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations." The weapon which Jesus uses is his Word of Truth. That Word peacefully tells you that all has been forgiven because victory over sin and the devil has been won. The peace which Jesus proclaims is the truth that you are at peace with God, no longer enemies of his nor are you hostile to him. Since you are at peace with God, you can rejoice greatly and shout when you see your humble King coming every day with righteousness for you, with eternal salvation for you.

I don't mean to downplay whatever hardship you're dealing with. Personal tragedy, world news, the uncertainty of war coming even closer to home: whatever affects us negatively is unsettling. But, we can apply Paul's words even to these present times. **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory will be revealed in us."** (Romans 8:18) A glory unmatched by anything we could hope or dream of in this life will be revealed in us. How can we be so sure? **"See, your King is coming to you!"**

Your King has come. He rode on to die and to rise. Your King comes daily as he proclaims peace to you. And, even more, your King is coming sometime in the future to say to you, **"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."** (Matthew 25:34) The glory that will be revealed in you is eternal perfection, and you will live *with* God. You see your King coming, and you see your glorified state, a glorified state that makes it impossible for you to sin. You will live in glory unable even to be tempted. You will be glorious so the effects of sin can no longer affect you: no sickness, no suffering, no sadness, no uncertainty about anything! While we have to wait for this glory in the new heavens and the new earth, it gives us reason to rejoice greatly and shout even now.

Dear friends, it's all about where you are looking, isn't it? The devil says, "Look, sickness is coming to you. Look, unemployment is coming to you. Look, an uncertain future is looming." If this is only what you're seeing, you have no reason to rejoice greatly. You have no desire to shout. But, we don't listen to the devil, the father of lies, do we? Instead we listen to our God who is in control. And, he says, "Look, your King is coming to you. He is righteous. He gives you salvation. He has a message of true peace even in the midst of chaos." It's impossible not to see what's going on around us. But, because of our God-given faith in Jesus, the coming King, we choose to focus our sights on what the King comes with. And, we have every reason to rejoice greatly and shout even now.

See, dear friends in Christ, your King is coming to you again this Holy Week. He is coming again amidst new fears, uncertainties, and tragedies. Whatever human feelings you're experiencing right now because of what's going on out there, the events of this week 2,000 years ago remind us that there is a time coming when our rejoicing and shouting will never be interrupted. We'll never question if we can rejoice and shout. This Holy Week and the weeks following, see your King. Make him your focus, and you will want to rejoice greatly. You will want to shout for joy no matter what even now. Amen.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. Amen.