

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Lent 6
March 25, 2018
Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer
You're the King
—John 12:12-19

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel!” That is what a man named Nathaniel said to Jesus the first time he met him. Nathaniel called Jesus *the King*. All because Jesus displayed a snippet of divine knowledge, revealing to Nathaniel that he knew exactly where Nathaniel was just minutes before their first meeting. “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree,” Jesus told Nathaniel. Nathaniel’s response: “Rabbi [Teacher], you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.” It was an appropriate response, but Jesus wanted Nathaniel to know that he hadn’t seen anything yet. “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.”

Jesus wasn’t kidding. Jesus did his first miracle shortly after that in Nathaniel’s hometown of Cana. At a wedding, Jesus changed water into wine. Kind of a small, quiet miracle compared to what Jesus would be doing later. But it was the first miraculous sign for Nathaniel and the rest of the disciples. Changing water into wine revealed that this man Jesus had the glory of God in him.

The miraculous signs increased in size and scope. On a return visit to Cana—again Nathaniel’s hometown—a government official came to Jesus, begging that Jesus come to his house to save his sick son from dying. Jesus healed the man’s son, without actually going to the home, just by saying the word from afar.

In Jerusalem Jesus came across a disabled man who had not walked in 38 years. The man asked Jesus to help him into a pool that supposedly had healing powers. Instead, Jesus told the man to stand up and walk home. So the man did.

Then came perhaps the most public miraculous sign that Jesus ever did. A great crowd was coming toward Jesus near the shore of the Sea of Galilee. A crowd of about 5,000 men, enough men to fill a Roman legion. What do you think it takes to feed a group of men like that? Jesus did it with five loaves of bread and two small fish, multiplying them out until there was even a surplus after everyone had eaten. This miracle caught the public’s attention. They wanted to make Jesus king, so he could feed them and take care of their needs every day just like this. But Jesus refused. That was not the kind of king Jesus came to be. Later that night, Jesus walked on water.

Back in Jerusalem Jesus gave sight to an adult male who had been blind since birth.

Eventually, also near Jerusalem, Jesus did the granddaddy of all miraculous signs up to that point. In Bethany Jesus had a dear friend named Lazarus. Lazarus got sick and died. And he was dead all right. Dead and buried for four days before Jesus got there to visit the dead man’s sisters, Mary and Martha, who were also dear friends of Jesus. “Lord, if you had been here,” Martha said to Jesus, “my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” “Your brother will rise again,” Jesus told her. She answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.” He went out to the gravesite, and in front of his disciples, in front of Mary and Martha, in front of a whole crowd of mourners, he projected his voice toward a dead man. “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, the grave cloths still wrapped all around him. Jesus said, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel!” “You believe because I told you I saw you under a fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.”

So that brings us to Palm Sunday. You might find it interesting that only John’s gospel mentions palms in particular, and that’s why this Sunday has its name. *The great crowd that had come for the Feast [that’s Passover] heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him.* John’s gospel also tells why the people grabbed festive palm branches and went out on that Palm Sunday. *The crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him.* Most of these people waving had not even seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. They are just like us today. They only heard about it. But just hearing about it was good enough for them. A man who could do that deserved some recognition and some praise. And they did praise him, using some of the same words Nathaniel had once used to praise Jesus. *They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!”* Their praises were appropriate. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods (Ps 95).

What’s up with God? He commands us to love him. He demands that we obey him. He proclaims himself King and then has us worship him. Why? Yeah, I know he’s God, but why? I mean, isn’t that kind of selfish? Kind of self-centered? Could you even

call it egotistical to make all these human beings, command them to love you, demand that they do what you say, have them worship you, and then damn them to hell if they don't? What's up with that? Who does God think he is, imposing himself over us like that, so he can just punish any and every act of disobedience on our part? We are only human, after all. And how can he really be the great King when this earth is such a mess? The way people treat each other is a crying shame. Gossiping, bullying, hating, killing. And what does God do to stop all that from happening? The things people have to suffer are a crying shame. Getting paralyzed, going blind, living in hunger and poverty, having to bury people they most dearly love, even their own children. And what does God do to stop all that from happening? What kind of a king is that? Maybe he should be using some of that kingly power to make people behave and have people suffer less here on earth. What's up with God, anyway?

Have these thoughts ever crossed your mind? I'm ashamed to say some of them have crossed mine. I've thought some of these things, sometimes still do—and I'm very sorry about that. If you have ever thought anything similar, if you still do think something similar, I am going to propose two reasons why that thinking is so wrong and so sinful.

If you question his kingship, you don't understand yourself. You don't understand your place. You were not made to be king. You were not made to sit in judgment over the king. You were fearfully and wonderfully made by God so you can find your ultimate joy in being loved and served by him and in turn by loving and serving him for his loving and serving you. If you think God is selfish, it's because you are.

If you question his kingship, you don't understand God. Some kind of egotistical, self-centered diving being with low self-esteem who needs the affirmation of his subjects is not a real god. It's a god of the human imagination. Likewise, a god who seeks your affirmation by proving his kingship, power, and love to you in the way you want it proven is not a real god. That's a god of your own mind. It's a god you have made up for yourself. The King of Israel riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is not the god of human imagination, nor is he the god of your mind. The Lord Jesus is the great God, the great King above all gods, including the ones that you make up on your own.

If the crowd on that first Palm Sunday had reason to shout praises and acclamation to the King of Israel—and they certainly did have reason to do so—we have more. We know the rest of the story. We know exactly what kind of a king was entering Jerusalem that day. A humble King. A gentle King. To drive away all fear from us. He rode in on a donkey, for heaven's sake! Because heaven had decreed that it be so. *Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."*

We know the rest of the story. We know exactly what kind of a king was standing five days later in front of Pontius Pilate. The King of truth. When Pilate asked Jesus if he was a king, Jesus said yes. But Jesus clarified what he was not. Not a king of this world. Not a king with servants who protect him and wage war for him. Jesus clarified what he was. A king who came from outside of this world and into this world to testify to the truth. He tells us we are sinful. He tells us we need God's forgiveness, we need to believe in God's forgiveness, or we will die eternally. Jesus tells us he is the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, and the true way to life, the only way to the Father. And that's the truth. Even if Pilate and his soldiers made fun of him for it, even if they put on him a purple robe and put a crown of thorns on his head. He still was and always will be the King of truth.

We know the rest of the story. We know exactly what kind of a king was crucified to the cross. Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Stripped of his own clothes, he made sure his own mother was taken care of in days to come. The only personal need he uttered from the cross was, "I'm thirsty," and that was to fulfill Scripture. He said his work was done, he finished what he was sent to do. And with that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. He died. The humble and gentle King, the King of truth, the King of the Jews who came to save the world from eternal death, that King died. And he was dead all right. A spear's plunge into his side proved it, and he was buried.

Setting up the biggest miracle of them all. The great-great-great granddaddy of all miraculous signs he had ever done and ever will do: the King raised himself from the dead. Took his life back up again, just like he had laid it down all by himself. You think those first Palm Sunday crowds had reason to praise Jesus? We have more. *"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!"* We understand why those things happened, why Jesus was orchestrating those events from Palm Sunday through Good Friday and into Resurrection Sunday. He was taking away our sin. He was saving us from eternal death under the wrath of God. And we know what he is going to do. *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"* He is coming back soon to raise all of us back from the dead and give us eternal life with him. He is coming back as King of kings and Lord of lords, and he shall reign forever and ever. We will actually live and reign with him, and we will see greater things than we have ever seen before.

What else can you say? "Lord Jesus, you're the King. You're my King. I am going to worship you this holy week. I am going to trust you and your good and gracious will for my life. I am going to serve you always, always. You're the King." Amen.