Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Tempe, Arizona
Palm Sunday
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Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Hosanna to the crucified!

5Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. 6Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, 7but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, 8he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. 9Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. — Philippians 2:5-11 EHV

Do you remember commercials? We used to have to watch them for 8 minutes out of a 30 minute television block. Back in the mid-2000's companies worked hard to make sure their commercials were engaging and entertaining because of their prevalence. They needed to stand out amongst the rest.

One of the commercial campaigns that stood out for me was the Starburst ads about the contradictions. They established various quirky characters who represented contradictions in themselves. One of them was a zombie on the bus. The living-dead was a contradiction.

These contradictions were to bring your attention to the fact that they claimed Starbursts were contradictions. They were solid, yet juicy. Although a chewable candy, they were so packed with flavor they were supposedly juicy. To be clear with our words, these examples in the Starburst ads were not really contradictions. They were more of paradoxes since they supposed themselves to be real. They were surprising juxtapositions. In these ads, you would hear about vampires who liked tanning and a super old guy who likes techno. These unusual combinations were supposedly like Starbursts.

In today's text, we run into a greater surprising juxtaposition. In this section of Scripture we see that Jesus is a king who was humbled. Jesus humbled himself, yet he was exalted. Jesus was lifted high on a cross. He was bowed down so that others would bow down to him - surprising combinations. Today, we will be led to cry out in recognition of these truths, "Hosanna to the crucified!"

Hosanna was the cry of the crowds as Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. He may not have looked the part as he rode the donkey. Yet, the people were moved to recognize that this Jesus deserved to be praised. They cried out to Jesus in the Matthew account, " *'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'*" (Matthew 21:9)

Those crowds may not have understood what they were saying as just a few days later, the chants would dramatically change. The crowds stopped hailing Jesus as Lord, instead they cried out for him to be crucified.

Today, in light of our surprising juxtapositional thoughts, we cry out a combination of these thoughts. We cry out, "Hosanna to the crucified!" It may not seem like it makes sense to combine these cries, but according to our text for today, Jesus' crucifixion is the very reason we can cry out to him as king.

The portion of the Bible that we look to today is known as the Carmen Christi or the "Hymn to Christ." According to biblical commentator, Ralph P. Martin, it is widely understood that this section of Philippians is an early Christian hymn that would have been well-known in Paul's day. People see the keys to this understanding being in the rhythmical cadence, elevated style, and theological content. Therefore, we can understand that when we cry out, "Hosanna to the crucified!," we are singing the same song that Christians have been singing for nearly 2,000 years.

This hymn can be broken down into two parts. These parts are the humiliation and exaltation. These are the states of Christ in who he is and what he did for us. We will first consider Christ's humiliation. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He is in very nature, God. He is truly God in every way. Yet, he did not use this status as something to be prized. This passage could be confusing. To put it simply, when the Son of God humbled himself, he remained truly God. Yet he was truly human. Although Jesus possessed all the attributes of God, he did not always use them or display them. When people looked at Jesus, he would have looked like any other regular human. This can be hard to understand because it is a mystery that God has revealed to us.

The teaching expressed here is called Jesus' humiliation. Jesus humbled himself. This took place at the incarnation, when he took on human flesh. However, we do not want to equate the two teachings. Jesus' humiliation is not simply that he became man, but that he took on the form of a servant. He put himself under the law and the curse of sin and death.

The culmination of Jesus' humiliation is seen on the cross. When Jesus was crucified, he bore the sins of the whole world. He was forsaken by God. He felt the pangs of hell. Jesus was humbled to die on a cross.

An important word to consider as we transition to Jesus' exaltation is the small transitional word, "Therefore." Because Jesus was humbled and died on a cross, he was exalted. Because he was crucified, he could be hailed as king. This is why we cry out, "Hosanna to the crucified!"

Let's now consider Jesus' state of exaltation. As a result of his victorious crucifixion, Jesus was exalted. His state of exaltation begins with his descent into hell. The Bible doesn't tell us much about this. We simply know that he was raised to life and proclaimed his victory to the spirits in prison, which is hell. Following this, Jesus rose from the grave. We will celebrate this in just a week from today. Forty days after that, we will celebrate his ascension. When Jesus ascended, he was seated at the right hand of the Father where he lives and rules eternally.

Jesus, who is seated at the right hand of the Father, is the one who deserves all honor and glory. The truth expressed in our text for consideration is also taught in Hebrews 12:2, "*Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal. In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God's throne.*" (Hebrews 12:2) At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess him to the glory of the Father. Therefore, all creation will cry out, "Hosanna to the crucified!"

When will all of creation cry out to praise Jesus? When will every tongue confess him as King? It will be on the Last Day. On Judgment Day, everyone will need to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Sadly, many of them will not be happy to do so. When Jesus comes in the clouds to judge the living and the dead, all will rise from the grave, and all will need to acknowledge him. All will bow their knee to King Jesus. Sadly, many of them will not be happy to do so, yet they will have no choice.

Believers, however, will be happy to proclaim him as Lord. They will sing out the truths of the Carmen Christi. They will sing the praises of Jesus our king. They will happily sing, "Hosanna to the crucified!" They will be able to do this because of what Jesus' crucifixion means for them. Because Jesus was humbled and then exalted, they too will be exalted, and they will rule with him. This is as it is written, "*Indeed, if we have died with him, we will also live with him; If we endure, we will also reign with him*." (2 Timothy 2:11b-12a) Jesus' reign is so great that he invites his people to rule with him.

In the previously mentioned Starburst commercials about their taste and form being a contradiction, they assert that their flavor doesn't make a wee bit of sense. During this Holy Week, you may be tempted to look at Jesus and think that the surprising juxtaposition of his humiliation and exaltation doesn't make a wee bit of sense either. On the outside, you obviously consent to these truths. You know it, but does it always sit right with you?

Let's examine this surprising juxtaposition a little further. Today, we march with palms, and we shout hosanna. On Friday, the tone will change dramatically. On Friday, the shouts of hosanna will quiet down. On Friday, we will be silent as we look at that King on a Cross.

Is that, however, what we expect a King to look like? Of course not! Now, I would not accuse you of thinking this way, but I want to take a moment to reflect. Are we tempted to shy away from the cross of Christ? Do we think this is not what a true hero… a true ruler… a true king looks like? Sadly, there are trends of in our nation that are shying away from the cross of Christ. Could they perhaps be humiliated by the humiliation of our Lord?

Many mainstream voices that talk about Jesus could be classified as cross-less. Many of these voices could be called moral, therapeutic deism. These voices are more concerned about talking about living a good life now. They don't want to talk about a God who mandated penal punishment and substitution. They don't want images of a bloodied, beaten man on a cross. Perhaps they are embarrassed of this humiliation. Perhaps they know that the world doesn't like this image. Perhaps they themselves don't truly understand the purpose of Christ's passion.

Brothers and sisters, let us not stand here and point at the others out there. Inwardly, do you feel that same aversion toward the cross of Christ? Do you want to underplay what Jesus did on the cross so you can talk more about what you need to do now? Maybe we could be the ones who fail to understand the purpose of Christ's passion.

Where could we see the signs of this mistaken view of Christ's passion? Maybe you make sure to impress on your grown children that they need to come to church on Easter. Why don't you push them to get to church on Good Friday as well? Perhaps when you talk to your neighbors about your faith, you lean more to extol Christian virtues and values than Christ extended on the cross. Dear friends, are we humiliated by Christ's humiliation?

May it never be so! Jesus' humiliation is the reason for his exaltation. Jesus' humiliation is the reason for your exaltation. When Jesus was on trial, he was mockingly called a king. When Jesus died on the cross, he wore a crown. This was a crown of thorns. When Jesus died on the cross, he was hailed as the King of the Jews. This was written with mocking intent. Those who jeered him didn't understand the true irony of what they said though. As Jesus was on the cross, he was accomplishing what we needed. His crucifixion meant victory.

As you approach this week, remember the reason. Remember why Jesus faced the punishment of sin. Jesus did this because of his love for you. Let this truth carry you through that you may not be embarrassed by the cross but cherish it. The cross was a brutal sight, but a beautiful one. Therefore, we will sing even more, "Hosanna to the crucified!" We will join believers of all time in praising Jesus as king for what he did on the cross.

A bleeding hero… a death that gives life… a crucified king… these are no contradictions. Perhaps these are surprising juxtapositions from our world's point of view, but to us it is a cherished sight. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, humbled himself for us to the point of death on the cross. Therefore, he was exalted where he lives and rules eternally. Now, we will proclaim forevermore, "Hosanna to the crucified!" Amen.