

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Palm Sunday

April 5, 2020

Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran

**Theme: Things are not always as they seem**

—Philippians 2:5-11

Things aren't always as they seem. You know the saying, "Don't judge a book by its cover." Long before that phrase was coined, the Lord said something similar. When the Prophet Samuel went to Bethlehem to anoint Israel's new king, he tried judging the book by its cover. Samuel met Jesse's firstborn son, Eliab, and immediately he thought, "Surely this is the Lord's anointed—the new king!" **"But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart'"** (1 Samuel 16:7). And finally, after Samuel saw each of Jesse's sons he met David, the least likely choice based on outward appearances, and he anointed him as king.

Things aren't always as they seem. About 1,000 years later came David's greater Son, *the* Anointed one, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And if David was the least likely candidate in his day, then that was even truer for Jesus Christ. He never lived in a palace. He didn't travel with the royal guard. As we see on Palm Sunday he didn't ride in style, or at least in the style of an ordinary king. He rode into town on a young donkey. And yes, crowds received as a king on that day. They rolled out the red carpet as best as they could by laying down their cloaks on the road and palm branches, and they shouted "Hosanna" (a cry for help and salvation). The crowds had heard about this great prophet from Nazareth who did miraculous things like raising Lazarus from the dead and they were excited to meet him. But here's my question. Where were those crowds on Good Friday? Where were the throngs of people crying out to release their king? Well the only crowds we read about on Good Friday were crying out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" So it safe to assume that some of the very same people cried "Hosanna" latter shouted "Crucify!" Why is that? Because they judged him based on outward appearances. Sure, they were able to look past the little donkey on Palm Sunday, but not cross on Good Friday. He saved others but he can't save himself?

We know the saying, Things aren't always as they seem, and yet we by nature have so much trouble looking beyond outward appearances. Many judged Jesus's importance on his outward appearance—the people he associated with; his lack of possessions; his humble way of life. And at first we may be quick to claim that we don't view Jesus that way, we know who he really is! But we view others in that way based on appearances. Haven't you ever assumed someone's status and importance based on the kind of car they drive the way that the dress? If a person looks polished and put together and confident, well then he's important. If he appears meek and unassuming, do we give him the time of day? We don't just judge other based on outward appearances, but we actually sometimes want others to judge us based on outward appearances. That's why we try to keep up appearances. We don't want people to see our problems and shortcomings. We want to appear better and more important that we really are. But things aren't always as they seem. As the Lord himself once said, **"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."** Beneath the façade is a broken, shameful, impure heart. That's what the Lord sees. There's no fooling him.

It's in our human nature to try and hide our weakness and flaunt our strengths. With Jesus it was the exact opposite. He concealed his strength and he made himself weak. In Philippians 2, the Apostle Paul writes one of the most beautiful confessions about Jesus Christ, **"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."**

Jesus Christ is fully God, equal to the Father, and yet when he walked this earth he did not take full advantage of his divine power. He never ceased to be God. He never lacked the full power of God. But he didn't flaunt it. He displayed his divine power when he performed miracles. He turned water into wine and he made bread for over five thousand people. But didn't go around snapping his fingers to make his own food appear. He got hungry and thirsty. Once an angry mob tried to force Jesus off a cliff, but Jesus miraculously walked through the crowd unharmed. But for the most part he walked in order to get places like any ordinary man. He didn't always play the "God card" especially when it came to the most crucial part of his work.

Paul continues, **"And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!"** He humbled himself. The God who dwelt above the highest heavens made himself low, so low, even to the point of death on a cross. When Jesus was crucified, there were two criminals crucified alongside him. They were being punished for their disobedience to the Roman law. For them crucifixion

wasn't optional. There's nothing they could have done to escape it. But Jesus was there on the cross being punished for our disobedience against God's law. He could have done something about it "**being in very nature God...**" But he, **did not consider equality with God something to be [asserted]** especially in this case. He could have saved himself from the hands of men because he's God, but instead he saved you.

To many it seemed like the king that rode into town on Palm Sunday, arrested on Maundy Thursday, and crucified on Good Friday, maybe wasn't as powerful and as important as they thought. Many people heard about the Prophet from Nazareth in Galilee and the wonderful things he had done—feeding the hungry; giving sight to the blind; making the lame walk; raising the dead. But later that week, they saw him die. Based on outward appearances, it seemed as though the road he traveled into Jerusalem was the road to defeat. But things aren't always as they seem. His path to the cross was the road to victory.

It might seem just as hopeless to us at times. Our lives have been far less than what God's law required. We've fallen short of Christ's humble example. We've attempted to keep up appearances when beneath the surface it's a total disaster. From an honest, humble point of view, it would seem that we've been defeated. But remember, things aren't always as they seem. It's not your outward appearance that makes you right with God. Nor is it by any effort or quality inside of you. It's God who makes right with God. It's God who in the person of Jesus Christ who humbled himself. By his humble death, he put to death your sin. By his blood, he washed away every stain, every impurity of your heart. He accomplished everything he set out to accomplish—your eternal salvation.

In the week ahead, Holy Week, we are going to contemplate the suffering of Jesus Christ and the depth of his humiliation. But remember, the path he starts down on Palm Sunday is the road to victory. Next weekend we will celebrate height of his exaltation. **God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

The praise Jesus received on Palm Sunday pales in comparison to the praise Jesus Christ now receives. Maybe you scratch your head at that thought. When you look at the world around you, it's clear that not every knee bows before Jesus Christ, not every tongue confesses him as Lord. We don't see that today. Do we? May it be seen in your life. Jesus humbled himself to death on a cross for you. God exalted him above all so that your knee may bow before Jesus, your king in repentance and humility. So that you may bow before him in faith and receive the full measure of his forgiveness and salvation. So that your tongue may confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. And you're not alone in this. Maybe you're alone now in your living room as you worship. But things aren't always as they seem. Other knees are bowing before Jesus right now. Other tongues are confessing the same Lord. We can't count them. We can't the knees of Christians throughout history that have bowed before Jesus in faith. We can't count the tongues of believers throughout all generations that have confessed Jesus Christ as their Lord too. But God can. God has them all numbered and he knows them by name. And praise God that you are numbered among the saints whose knees have bowed at the name of Jesus and whose tongues have confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord to the Glory of God the Father.

Amen.