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ALL GLORY, LAUD, AND HONOR

John 12:20-43; Lent 6B, Palm-Passion; February 23-24, 2024

On the first Palm Sunday, the crowds glorified God with shouts of “hosanna” as Jesus entered Jerusalem. This morning we sang “all glory, laud, and honor” to God for Jesus who came to be our Savior. “Glory” is our focus today. Jesus’s teaching after entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, as recorded in John 12, focused on “glory.”

Jesus said that the hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified. He prayed that His Father’s name be glorified, to which the Father in heaven responded, **“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”** Jesus then noted how the Old Testament prophet Isaiah had foreseen His glory and how Jesus in His glory would be rejected by many people. Past and present, people won’t openly confess faith in Jesus out of fear of those who might oppose them and their faith. Jesus explains: **“They loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”**

There are two kinds of glory that people can laud and honor: the glory of God and the glory of man. How are these two kinds of glory different from each other? The core difference between them is shown by how Jesus would be glorified and, thereby, glorify His Father’s name. Jesus explained the words that thundered from heaven. **“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world [Jesus means Satan] be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth [Jesus refers to His cross], [I] will draw all people to Myself.”** **He said this to show by what kind of death He was going to die.** God is glorified in His Son’s death on the cross.

This makes sense of what Jesus said earlier. **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”** We often hear these words at the graveside committal service. Because the Seed, Jesus, died, those who die in Him will rise with Him. Even in death, all glory, laud, and honor belong to God alone.

Palm Sunday brings into sharp focus the stark contrast between God's glory and man's glory. It is as different as light is from dark. John began his Gospel confessing God's Son as Light in this dark world. **"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."** Today we heard Jesus describe His coming crucifixion and death in a similar way: **"The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."**

Both John one and twelve speak of Jesus, the Word made flesh, as bringing light into this dark world but, unless you can read the original Greek, you won't notice that the word translated **"overcome"** in John one and **"overtake"** in John 12 is the same word (καταλαμβάνω). The darkness of sin and death in the world cannot **overcome** Jesus because, even though He died, He rose from the dead. Because this is true of Jesus, those who believe in Jesus, even though the darkness of death will come upon us because of our sin, that darkness cannot **overtake us** or **overcome us** who walk in the Light of Christ.

Jesus' remarks that those who are **"in the darkness"** don't know where they are going because they can't see the way and so are overcome in the darkness and lost, but those who have the light – those who believe that Jesus is the Light that shines in the dark – see and know the way because they have **become sons of light**. The darkness did not overcome Jesus, and the darkness will not overtake or overcome us because we have the light of Christ as sons of light.

Jesus knew that His disciples would run away in fear and hide in the dark when His Passion came to avoid suffering and dying like Him. Jesus noted that there were some among the Jewish authorities, the Sanhedrin that put Jesus on trial and condemned Him to death a couple days later, who actually believed in Him as God's Messiah. This might have included Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who went to Pontius Pilate after Jesus died, asking to take down His dead body from the cross and bury it. But, while Jesus was still living, they were afraid to confess faith in Him out of fear of the authorities.

“They loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.” They loved their prominent positions in the eyes of others more than how God would see them through faith in Jesus. This is a temptation all of us face. The dominant philosophy of the culture around us considers orthodox belief in God and behaving according to God’s unchanging Word as outdated, backwards, and even hateful toward the majority of Americans who have rejected this godly faith and life.

Jesus warns us that loving the things of man more than the things of God is a serious problem. Evidence that this is a problem among us are the many people “on the books” as members of our congregation who seldom if ever attend services at what is supposed to be “their church.” I am not referring to those who are unable to attend because of illness, age, weakness, or handicap. Most of them would give anything to be able to come to church again.

I am talking about members who live in and around town but will find everything else to do rather than come to church. I am talking about members who have moved away from the area and never looked for a new church home. I am talking about members who have not given the church their current addresses and phone numbers so we know where they are and can contact them. I am talking about members who, when we try to contact them, refuse to answer calls. I am talking about members, when they are finally released from membership because they refuse to repent of **loving the world’s glory more than God’s glory**, they accuse the church and her pastors of being unloving hypocrites.

Releasing from membership people who won’t come to church is actually one of the most loving things we can do for them. It is the call to repent of their sins of loving the world more than God and to come back to church with penitent hearts and faith that Jesus died for their sins and rose to declare them forgiven before God. We are concerned about the eternal salvation of those who have abandoned God’s house, who fear losing their reputations before the world more than they fear God. And this is not that the church accepts only “good people” who are not as bad sinners as others. The Church only accepts sinners as members, but always for the forgiveness of their sins, not to continue unrepentant in those sins.

...which brings us back to the glory of Jesus on Palm Sunday.

Jesus' glory was to be lifted up on the cross to die for sinners. The name of God the Father is glorified by sinners being baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, **“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”** Jesus is glorified when the darkness of sin, unbelief, death, and the devil is overcome by the light of His resurrection. Jesus is glorified when sinners quit loving the glory of man and boldly confess their faith in Him and His glorious cross. Jesus' glory shines in the darkness of this world when Christians keep faith in Him and are not overtaken by darkness but walk in the light as sons of the light.

Palm Sunday was a watershed moment in Jesus' ministry. It was the point of no return on His trek to the cross and then resurrection. He said of that moment: **“Now is the judgment of this world... And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself.”** Today, we have two distinct choices, two options when it comes to which way we will go. Are we going to walk through the darkness of death into the light of Jesus' resurrection as sons of light? Or are we going to love the darkness rather than the light? Are we going to love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God?

The glory of man looks like it will be more fun. Certainly, it will be focused on ourselves and satisfying our wants and desires. It looks like the easier way, and in many ways it is. But know this. The glory of man involves hiding in the dark out of fear that the world won't like us if we reject the world's darkness. And lurking in that darkness is death that is unavoidable.

The glory of God looks like it is the harder way, and it is. It begins with the suffering and death of Jesus in the dark. It means confessing the darkness of our sin that caused His death and wanting to walk in the light of Christ that forgives our sins. The glory of God involves being rejected by those who love the darkness and don't want to walk in God's light. It still means that death is waiting for us, but sin, death, and the devil have been judged already on Jesus' glorious cross. Which shall it be, the glory of man or the glory of God?

All glory, laud, and honor be to God alone! Amen.