

**Sermon for
Palm Sunday
Day 41...**

Date: April 5, 2020

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Processional Gospel: John 12:12-19

Old Testament: Isaiah 50:4-9

Epistle Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Gospel Reading: Matthew 27:11-66

Sermon Title: Day 41 and Beyond...

Hymns:

LSB 442 – A Glory, Laud and Honor

LSB 438 – A Lamb goes Uncomplaining Forth

LSB 422 – On My Heart Imprint Your Image (*Offertory*)

LSB 436 – Go to Dark Gethsemane

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Creative Worship



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Grace, peace, and God's great mercy I pray would be yours in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

In the Bible the number '40' has meaning. It appears many times, always around a time of testing or a time of preparation. It never ends there. It's not supposed to. In the Bible you have:

Jesus is in the wilderness for 40 days. Then He starts His ministry.

Israel in in the wilderness for 40 years. Then they start to enter the Promised Land.

God gave Nineveh 40 days to repent. Then they started to return to God and praised Him.

The list goes on...

We have just spent 40 days reading, learning and challenging ourselves in the Red Letter Challenge. Today is day 41. Now what? It's over. Put the book on the shelf so that in a time to come you can reminisce about that good thing pastor talked us into doing that one year when the virus hit. If that is all this was, you shouldn't have bothered.

These past 40 days were a time of preparation and probably a little testing. There was a little bit of challenge in the Red Letter Challenge, just as there were challenges in the sermons and some of the things they conveyed. Hopefully it stretched you a bit. Hopefully it push you a little further then you thought you would go. Hopefully it caused you to grow.

Now what? ...

Whether or not your team wins, the day after the Super Bowl is always a bit of a let-down. The hype is over. One team has the Lombardi Trophy, and the other has a great season, and a whole heap of disappointment. The Twitterverse has been atwitter with what commercial was best, and whether the half time show was worth the time. ...and then football is done.

The ends of things that we enjoy, or excitedly anticipate, can bring a sense of let-down or emptiness, but I hope the end of our Red Letter Challenge will be different. Here's why. Because this 40 days was supposed to change us. What did we learn?

We learned five things:

- 1) Being: Being with Jesus. Jesus being with us. We being with each other.
- 2) Forgiving: Forgiving like Jesus. Being forgiven by Jesus.

- 3) Serving: Serving like Jesus. Serving as Jesus to others.
- 4) Giving: Giving like Jesus. Giving ourselves and our treasures for others' salvation.
- 5) Going: Going like Jesus. Going like He taught us to do. Going to bring the Good News of salvation to many.

The five principles we've explored over the past 40 days aren't meant to be learned and shelved. They are for living the next 40 days, and all the days after that. You are standing at the starting line. The starter's shot is about sounded, but it's not: "Ready, set, go!" It's: "Be, forgive, serve, give, and go!" Remember, God goes with you. May He richly bless your journey.

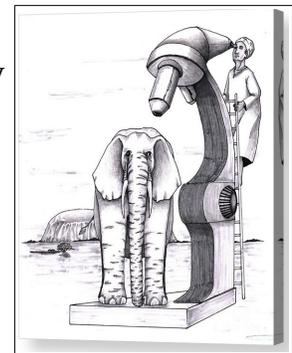
A Few last things to consider, before you go, take some time once again to **be** with God. Open your Bible, pray, and consider questions like these:

1. Am I **being**, spending quality time, with God?
2. Are there people I need to **forgive**? If so, who?
3. What needs do I see around me? How can I **serve**?
4. As God has blessed me by providing for my needs, I can help provide for others. What needs has God placed in front of me? What can I **give** to help meet those needs?
5. Where is God calling me to **go**?



The Church in America, but more specifically our denomination, and our congregation, has faced a problem for a long time without really facing it. The pews have filled a little less month to month, year to year. The attendance has dwindled, but so slowly you hardly notice it. Until you take a step back.

You can be too close to a problem, and when you are too close you can't really see it. You need to take a step back. From around the time of World War I the Lutheran Church has changed. We used to be a very active church in outreach and sharing our faith. With the onset of WWI we, being a German speaking people, sounded too much like the enemy of that time. So the Lutheran Church in many ways hunkered down. They went quiet.



We became accustomed to sitting back. We became comfortable with our churches growing only through babies being born, through evangelism outreach being done at the Baptism Font. We as a church forgot those outside our walls. The results of that can be seen best by those who have been here the longest.

They see the empty seats far more clearly than those who are new. Those who have been here the longest can see the change, because they can take a step back. They can remember back when the pews were full. They can remember the decisions that were made and why this building was built with so many seats, when the congregation moved to this building.

They had plans to grow. The problem was those plans did not consider a future where America started dismissing Christianity as un-useful. It was also around that very same time that the face of Austin, MN began to change. Austin is now one of the most diverse areas in the country. For being a small city of only about 25,000 people, we have among us people groups from all over the world. They are here from Africa, Asia, Europe, South America and North America.

When I came here I was excited, to the point of being overwhelmed, with the opportunities to share Jesus with so many. I had never envisioned such a place with so many places to service God. Remember I have not been in a shrinking congregation over 20 years. I've been in big ones, small ones, mission starts and congregation restarts, but all of them were growing. Those congregations awoke to the problem, got out of their proverbial bed, and got to work sharing Jesus. The people responded and came. They were taught about being a Christian and of the security, in forgiveness and salvation, it bring.

Our processional reading today was different from most Palm Sunday Processionals. It was from the Revelation to St. John. Listen again to part of it:

I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every **nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, **clothed in white robes**,

Where do we get our white robe? Right there! (At the Baptism Font.) ... and yet some would hold this Holy and Sacred Sacrament in contempt, or dismiss it as irrelevant or in the way.

Our reading continued:

[They were holding] palm branches in their hands,

In ancient Israel the palm branch was the symbol of freedom. Listen to Jesus:

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.¹

1 John 8:36

Are there some who would declare those the Son has set free to be slaves again? Would you relinquish them to slavery to sin, slavery to Satan, slavery to death, death eternal? They will not be! Listen to Jesus:

Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.²

In which group are you? It matters because those standing before the throne and the Lamb are:

crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”³

Those on the left side of the throne are already gone. We read Jesus words just a little while ago:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left...

In this scene that John gives us in the book of Revelation those on the left are already gone. If Jesus said:

Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.⁴

In which group are you? Or perhaps the better questions: In which group do you want to be?

St. John’s Lutheran Church has the opportunity to become that glorious array of people right here, in this place. We have before us the opportunity to be the Church that Jesus sees; that Jesus wants; that Jesus saves. Or we can be the like the Church of Ephesus. Jesus said to them:

Remember from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.⁵

May God keep our lamp burning, and ever so brightly, so that on the Last Day we can with all the faithful wear our white robes, wave our palm branches of

2 Matthew 12:30
3 Revelation 7:9-10
4 Matthew 12:30
5 Revelation 2:5

freedom, and be set free eternally by Jesus in whose words and ways we have just spent 40 day.

May these past 40 days be for you a change in your heart, your mind, your eyes and may all of that flow through your mouth that your voice sings His praise and shares His forgiveness and salvation with all those around you who so desperately need to hear it.

I pray that for you in Jesus' Holy Name.

Amen.

As we Gather

Now that we've spent 40 days in prayer and preparation let's get working. The nations are at our door step. The message of Holy Week is Salvation has come and His name is Jesus!

Children's Sermon