

Palm Sunday 2018:

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Date: 25 March 2018

Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

So it is reported that the founding father, Benjamin Franklin, once said, Beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy. Now, I know that's a really weird quote for such a solemn day, but stick with me.

To be clear, it turns out that Franklin didn't actually say this, but it does make for an interesting quote, does it not? And in case you're worried, my Palm Sunday sermon isn't going to be about beer or Ben Franklin.

But if you're disappointed about that, please accept my sincere apology. But as I was preparing for this Palm Sunday, this Passion Sunday service, I was struck by something.

As I looked at the readings, especially the Passion narrative, as I looked at the liturgy, as I thought about the week ahead we have in front of us. And here is what struck me. The cross is proof that God loves us and desires not mere happiness for us, but our eternal and everlasting good.

[1:37] John 3.16 comes to mind here. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Now, it is amazing that God loves us so much that he would become one of us, that the Father would send his Son into the world.

But this week, as we look at the cross, as we wait to celebrate the empty tomb, we are reminded that here, we see love so amazing, so divine, that the only proper response is to offer our souls, our lives, everyone, everything, the one who loved us when we were his enemies.

So this day and this week, my brothers and sisters, look. Look to the cross. Look to Christ's body broken for you.

Look to Christ's blood poured out for you. Look. Trust. Be amazed at the unfathomable grace and love of God for sinners like ourselves.

[2:46] We look to Christ crucified for us. And we can't help but agree with what we read this morning in Isaiah.

There is no God besides our God, and there is no God like our God. There is no other God, and certainly no other God who is both a righteous God and a Savior.

Can anything compare with God's grace and love to us in Jesus Christ? Is there any God like that? I would have to say that nothing can compare.

I stand amazed when I consider what Jesus did for me. Don't you? What we read about Jesus in Philippians 2 just blows my mind.

We read in verse 6 of Jesus, Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Let's break that down for a second.

[3:53] Jesus is God, the Son, who existed before he became a man from all eternity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Think about what that means when we reflect in light of what we see happening on the cross.

It means this. Our God was willing to become a man and die for us. The Father was willing to give his only and eternal Son for us.

Go on to read in verse 7, Again, God became man.

This isn't just some abstract thing. God became man for you and for me. God the Son, the one through whom all things were created, took the form of his creatures.

The one through whom mankind was created became a man. The God to whom we owe all obedience and all worship became a servant for us. What kind of a God would do such a thing?

[5:01] Only a God whose love and mercy are astonishing and boundless. And it doesn't end there. Verse 8, Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point

of death, even death on a cross.

Why in the world would Jesus, who is God in the flesh, submit to being beaten, mocked, stripped, nailed to a cross to die an agonizing death?

What kind of a God would do such a thing? The answer is this. The kind of God who loves sinners and is determined to save them from their sins.

A righteous God and a Savior. Who is like our God. Anyone? Why did Jesus become disobedient even unto death?

The answer is clear. To undo our disobedience. To rescue us from the consequences of our disobedience. Because the truth, my brothers and sisters, is this.

[6:13] We have been so disobedient to our Creator. We have sinned again and again against a holy God.

It's hard to hear it, but here's the solemn truth. God would have been justified in wiping the whole bunch of us off the face of the earth. But He didn't.

Because we have a God who loves the broken, who loves the fallen, who loves sinners. Who loves even His enemies. But He's also a God whose holiness demands perfection.

Well, we've already messed that up. None of us have been perfect. None of us are righteous. So what does God do to save the unrighteous?

Since we are not righteous. Since we've disobeyed Him. He sends His Son. He sends His Son to be perfectly obedient in our place and to die the death that we deserve.

[7:21] He sends His Son to become a man. To be a perfect representative. And a perfect substitute for us. And what does that mean? It means that He paid our debt, my brothers and my sisters.

And He didn't just pay a little bit of it. Like a 50-50 kind of arrangement. No. He paid it all. Sin had left us staying.

And what did Jesus do? He washed us white as snow with His very own blood. And all this makes all the difference in the world.

This sets Christianity apart from any other religion. Sets the living God apart from any other God. Sets it apart from religions that teach that God only accepts people who are good, for example.

Christianity is different. Christianity, the Gospel, teaches that those who think that they're good are actually fooling themselves. And that God accepts those who trust in what Christ has done for them.

[8:32] In Christianity, our salvation depends on what Christ has done and not on what we have done. That means we are called simply to trust in Christ.

Christ. The Anglican pastor and teacher John Stott once wrote in his classic book, *The Cross of Christ*. Christ's salvation must be a free gift.

He purchased it for us at the high price of His own lifeblood. So what is there left for us to pay? Nothing. Since He claimed that all was now finished, there is nothing for us to contribute.

It was like our God. A righteous God and a Savior. The Gospel tells us that we don't have to, that we can't earn our salvation. Not even a little bit.

No, the Christian Gospel is a very different message. A message that teaches us that our salvation is already paid for by the blood of Christ.

[9:33] That salvation is a free gift and that there is nothing for us to add. We are called simply to come to God with empty hands.

To come say it in the words of that great hymn, *Rock of Ages*, Nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy cross I cling. And it doesn't matter who we are, what we've done, no matter how awful it is, the message is the same for every single person.

Come to Jesus just as you are. Jesus is sufficient to save the very worst of us.

And the very best of us aren't good enough to withstand God's judgment without the forgiveness that's found in Christ. Now I have to say, I'm about to get a bit ahead of myself here and venture into Easter territory.

And it is a serious Anglican sin to fail to heed the liturgical calendar. So, I apologize. But I have to follow this passage through to its conclusion.

[10:49] Jesus died. And he didn't stay dead. More on that next week. And what has happened? We read, Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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, the glory of God the Father. Jesus is now highly exalted.

He was lifted up on the cross for our salvation to draw us to himself. And now he reigns in glory. Where? He is still drawing people to himself.

He drew me to himself. I know that. Did he draw you to himself? Or maybe he's drawing you to himself this morning.

I think about the exaltation of Jesus. When I remember that it's so easy to get discouraged about the state of our world.

[12:09] It's so easy to get discouraged about the state of our culture. It's so easy to get discouraged about all these things. It is so easy to be afraid. But we don't have to be discouraged or afraid.

Because Jesus is exalted. And we already know how that's going to end. Every knee bowing. Every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. To be on the right side of history is ultimately the only final way to be on the right side of history.

To be on the right side of Jesus is the way to be on the right side of history. And all over the world, knees are already bowing.

Tongues are already confessing. Again, forgive me for smuggling some Easter joy into our Clinton penitents. But the Bible made me do it. The 4th century saint Athanasius of Alexandria said this.

[13:21] The Savior is working mightily among men. Every day he is invisibly persuading numbers of people all over the world. To accept his faith and be obedient to his teaching.

Can anyone, in the face of this, still doubt that he has risen and lives? Or rather, that he is himself the life? Does a dead man prick the consciences of men?

And of course, the answer to that is no. We can't doubt that Jesus is alive and exalted. Because Jesus is still giving new life to the broken.

Is still saving sinners and is still changing lives. You know, I was reading a report the other day that suggested that by the year 2030, if current trends continue, China will have the largest Christian population on earth.

Let that sink in for a minute. All over the world, Jesus is still calling people to bend their knee and to confess him.

[14:32] Now, the current statistics and trends aren't looking so good for us in the West. But that's no reason to be discouraged. God can change that in an instant, can't he?

There is no reason to get discouraged or be afraid. Because Christ has died, has risen, and is exalted. He is calling people from all over the world to himself.

But he still calls to us. There is no other God besides me. A righteous God and a Savior. There is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved.

All the ends of the earth. For I am God and there is no other. Turn to him this morning.

Because we can be sure that if we turn to Christ, we will be saved. And there is salvation in no other name.

[15:37] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.