

Palm Sunday Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

Truly this was the Son of God. +

The royal procession of Palm Sunday leads to a cross, one of the cruelest means of execution and humiliation ever devised. But the royalty of Jesus, the King of the Jews, is revealed in his humility, riding on a donkey, and in his patience, suffering silently.

We follow Jesus today, and we are reminded that to follow him means to receive his example, which is one of inward humility and outward patience. The fruit of a humble mind is patience. That humility and patience were triumphant through the ordeal of the cross. Humility and patience allowed Jesus to bear: desertion by all his friends, betrayal by one of his chosen twelve, denial by his right-hand man, rejection by his own people, spitting and slapping, the whips of the lash which tore open the flesh on his back, the whips of the tongues which taunted and teased and broke open his heart, all

Palm Sunday Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

the pushing and shoving, the sleepless night, the unjust trial, the screaming for his death, the humiliation of being stripped naked, the nails, the sight of his mother and her sorrow, the heat, the torture, the pain, the anguish, the aloneness, and more still than we can know or could ever bear. The humility and patience of Jesus won, and our King was triumphant on the cross and in his death.

Above the head of Jesus his charge was written, as we read in Greek, Latin and Hebrew: "This is the King of the Jews." You see this on many crosses abbreviated as the four Latin letters INRI, which stand for Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Judaeans. He who was hailed as King was crucified as King. And the horror of this week has been brought so forcefully to us in the Church's liturgy, which requires us to cry both "Blessed" and "Crucify".

But don't be horrified by the crowd, don't be scandalized by the liturgy. Rather, hear and see and know your own self in that crowd, and recognize the discord in your own life, between your creed and

Palm Sunday Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

your deed, between your Sunday and your weekday - and repent. In the Gospel, it seems that the crowd gets their way, and their voices prevail over Pilate's weakness. The Chief priests and the elders seem to win. Their will is to destroy Jesus. They delight in their power over him, soldiers and clergy and crowds, and through all this our Jesus is silent. They delight in power, and love is silent. And it seems that they do have the power to destroy. But who is in control, and who wins that day? Who is in control, and who is out of control?

Christ's humility and patience are not destroyed.

St. Matthew points us to three victories of Jesus on the cross, three victories of Christ in his death.

When Jesus died and gave up the ghost, the Bible tells us: "Behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom." The first victory Matthew records is over sin. That veil,

Palm Sunday Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

that separation and alienation of humanity from God which is sin, has been torn and ripped apart. In the death of Jesus, there is this new access to God, and the division is undone. For in Jesus we are at one with God, for in him there is a mediation between God and men, the God-man. And in him there is a remedy for sin, so that we are at one with God.

"And the earth did quake and the rocks rent , and the graves were opened." The two modes of burial in the ground or in a rock cave are here signified. The second victory of Christ's cross was over death. In conquering sin, he conquered death. For as death entered by sin, so the righteousness of Christ leads to life. We are freed from the prison of death by the cross of Christ. These are the first two victories of Christ which are known in our lives in the forgiveness of sins and in eternal life. These are God's free gifts to all who will receive them by faith in Jesus.

Palm Sunday Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

But Matthew records one more victory. Jesus, who conquered sin and death, also conquered the hard hearts of those soldiers at the cross and of the centurion. When the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the son of God.

These then are the victories of Christ: humble, patient, suffering; victory over sin; victory over death; and victory over hard hearts. The first two are complete for us, but this third victory is still being won in the world. This week, the victory of Christ we must seek, is that he would conquer our hard hearts, that we might look on the cross and know "Truly this was the son of God". Christ Jesus humbled, emptied and sacrificed himself for you. He spent himself entirely, so that you might be saved entirely. Make no mistake, that it was human sin - yours and mine - which made the cross and death of Jesus necessary. BUT it was the love of God, which made it

Palm Sunday Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

possible. We turn our attention this week away from our own sins, to focus on the love and mercy of God. For the cross tells us which is greater. His forgiveness exceeds all our sins, his humility exceeds our pride, his patience exceeds our hatred and anger, and his life exceeds our death.

God did not send anyone else but came himself. This is the saving truth. He came himself in the person of his son, and took on our flesh and blood so as to die for us. The Judge of all took the place of the guilty, to pay once and for all for our offence. This is what Almighty God has done for us. So let us confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and let us gather to the cross and proclaim "Truly this was the Son of God". The power of the cross, of Christ's death, is here. The power and virtue of his death is present to us to be received here in this communion. Let us come, then, to him and let him have the victory in us over sin and death, and over our hard

Palm Sunday Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

hearts, that we might know and receive and enjoy, forgiveness, life and love. Amen.