

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

The dual theme of this day is always rather jolting. It begins with Jesus entering Jerusalem in triumph to shouts of *“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”* It ends with Jesus ascending the cross and dying. The day begins with us joining with the Jerusalem crowd with our own song of welcome: *“The multitude of pilgrims With palms before You went: Our praise and prayers and anthems Before You we present”*; we depart to a funeral march. *“Joseph of Arimathea ... wrapped [Jesus] in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb.”* The Father's only Son was *“obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”*

Jesus had already spent a couple days in Jerusalem before we take up the Passion account from Mark. Of course, there is far too much in the Passion of Christ to ponder in this sermon: the plot, the betrayal, the arrest, the testimony, the verdict, Peter's denial, the handing over to Pilate, the interrogation, the offer to release a prisoner, the calls for blood, the mocking and scourging and spitting and reviling, His crucifixion, the darkness.

And indeed, in this darkness, the light shines the brightest. In this darkness, we see Jesus' glory. Engulfed in this darkness, Jesus was bearing the sins of the world. He was enduring the wrath of a God that does not countenance sin, enduring a fiery judgment upon sin. The sinless Son of God endured God's wrath and judgment for us that God might extend upon us sinners instead forgiveness. And as the saying goes, *“it is always darkest just before the day dawns,”* so, having born *“the iniquity of us all”* (Is. 53:6) for six hours on the cross, Jesus had to endure even more ignominy — divine forsakenness.

Yet, derelict, hanging alone on the tree, the end neared; our redemption was nearly completed. Thus, emerging out of the depths of this darkness, we hear Jesus cry out to the Lord, not in despair but in hopefulness: *“My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?”* *“For,”* *“Christ, the Son of the Blessed”* knew that God had *“not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he [had] not hidden his face from him, but [had] heard, when he cried to him”* (Ps. 22:24).

Moreover, we know that His cry has subsumed all of ours into it, for even now as we cry out of the depths to the Lord, when we cry for mercy, because of the Son's redemption for us, because of His offering for our guilt, there is forgiveness for us, we are accounted righteous, and the heavens are now opened back up to us.

With this then accomplished, Jesus died, but in His dying, He did yet more, for more than simply *“breath[ing] his last,”* Jesus breathed out the Spirit — Matthew says, He *“sent forth the Spirit”* (Matt. 27:50) — sending Him forth into

the world that He might lead people by His testimony to confess Jesus as Lord, even as the centurion, who saw Jesus send forth the Spirit, acknowledged that Jesus was truly the Son of God.

This fruit of Jesus' death, which came in full measure at Pentecost, fills the church today. For according to His promise, Jesus has not left His own as orphans (Jn. 14:18). He sent and sends still the Spirit as our Helper to focus our minds on Jesus, bearing witness to Him, to His crucifixion for us, and His resurrection.

The Spirit works through the word of God proclaimed purely and the Sacraments administered rightly, even as here shortly we are privileged to witness the baptism of Lillian Ruth Graf and the gift of the Holy Spirit coming to her. That Spirit, breathed out by Jesus in death, will unite Lillian to that same death and to His burial, so that He might also unite her to Jesus' resurrection. What wondrous grace, for as surely Jesus won our salvation at the cross as we just heard, so also surely He grants us this salvation by the work of the Holy Spirit, whom He breathed out, by "*the washing of regeneration and renewal*" (Tit. 3:5) of Holy Baptism, "[sundering us] from the number of the unbelieving, [preserving us] dry and secure in the holy ark of Christendom" (Luther's Flood Prayer).

Thus, although it seems jolting, it's not really so much, for we acknowledge that even though we call Jesus' entry at the start of the week "triumphal," the real triumph happened on a cross in darkness, shame, and death. The real triumph meant death for Jesus but life again in three days. Death also visits us, but in Christ, we triumph, too, for Jesus sent forth His Spirit and still does by word and water and supper, and these make Christ's triumph our triumph. Therefore, "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!*"

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.