

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, King, and Saviour. The title for today’s sermon is “Telling the story” and is based on the Old Testament reading, from Zechariah chapter nine. Let us pray.... Amen.

Today is the fourth Sunday after Pentecost, yet the Old Testament reading sounds strikingly familiar to the readings we hear on Palm Sunday. “**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**”(Zechariah 9:9) It seems out of place, but at the same time somewhat refreshing. The readings for the past two Sundays proclaimed war, conflict, and troubles, but in today’s Old Testament reading we hear of hope and salvation.

Zechariah was called to proclaim God’s Word, you could say God’s story to the people of Jerusalem. I am not a fan of the word story because it is too often associated with fairytale, but the word ‘story’ is accurate and does tell the truth. Each of us has a story; our life, our experiences, what and who we are, and the world around us. We tell our story to others, our kids, and grandkids.

Yet God’s story is different than ours. We are not alone in telling it. All people have experienced God’s story in one way or other, whether they recognize it or not. There are many who have shared God’s story with others, and numerous continue to share God’s story.

Zechariah was called to proclaim God’s Word, His story to the people of Jerusalem. The first 8 chapters of the Book of Zechariah were written between 520 and 518 BC. Zechariah revealed his apocalypse: His vision from God. God provided Zechariah with the words to help deal with the specific problems of rebuilding the Jerusalem temple and with the priesthood. The exiles who had returned were encouraged by God to complete the temple and also demonstrate their faithfulness to God. This encouragement was nothing new. Throughout the nation of Israel’s history, through their story, God had to repeatedly call, encourage, and direct them back to Him because they often strayed. In our text, God had brought many back from their exile, returned them to the land He promised them, where they could worship Him faithfully, and now through Zechariah, was helping them as they faced the troubles of rebuilding the temple in a hostile territory.

But that encouragement was not the end of the story. God revealed two prophetic oracles to Zechariah, recorded in chapters 9 to 14. These were written later, possibly after 480 BC. The two oracles looked ahead to the coming Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. Today’s text is recorded at the beginning of the second section, the story to come.

Right off the start of this second section, Zechariah tells of the coming of the messiah king to and for his people and the rich comfort he brings. The people of God are encouraged to rejoice greatly at the king’s arrival. Who wouldn’t celebrate at the joyous, and long awaited event. Zechariah beautifully describes the messiah in the imagery of the words of God’s story recorded in the Old Testament. “The messiah is described as having the attributes of righteousness and humility and bringing salvation. He is described as being “**mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the fowl of a donkey.**”(Zechariah 9:9) The significance of his riding a

donkey is threefold. First, it marks the messiah as one who is humble and therefore a servant to those he comes to save. Second, it signals that he arrives in peace, as opposed to riding on a war horse, *as is described in the next verse*. Finally, it marks *the messiah* as one of the royal line of David, since the mule (or donkey) was the mount used by David and his sons (2 Samuel 13:29, 16:2, 18:9; 1 Kings 1:33)"(Concordia Journal, Spring 2014, p.175)

"Verse 9 *tells the story and* announces **that** the king will bring salvation. *Then* verses 10 and 11 describe **how** he will do so. He disarms those bearing the implements of war and speaks peace to the nations, reminiscent of the messianic prophecies of Isaiah (2:4, 9:5-7, 11:1-10) and Micah (5:10-11). He establishes his universal rule over the nations, as earlier prophets had foretold. Based on the blood of the covenant between God and His people, the king shall free your prisoners from the waterless pit," echoing the promises of liberation by the Servant of the Lord announced by Isaiah (61:1-2). Those who were formerly imprisoned He will return to the protection ("stronghold") of God and provide restoration beyond even their original state of security ("I will restore to you double")."(Concordia Journal, Spring 2014, p.175)

This is no fairytale. No fictional novel. This is the story of salvation. This is God's story, prepared from before the foundations of the world (1 Peter 1:20) for the salvation of all people. God's story is so much greater than any other story. It is so basic even an infant can get it, yet so complex and profound that even a lifetime of study is far too short to fully understand everything.

And so the story we read is profoundly simple. A man rides into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. Not the first, nor the last. And yet it is part of God's story for you. For this was the promised king in the land He gave them, coming into the city He chose, going up to His house where He promised to meet His people and where His people were offering their burnt offering to Him to save them from their sins. The man on the donkey was not like the other kings, emperors, or Caesar of the day, men who claimed to have become gods; No, for this One was God who took on flesh and became man.

This King was unlike any other king. While He shared the title king, HE did not share much else. This King did not stand behind His army and send them off to battle for Him, NO, He went before us all and went into battle none of us could even hope to withstand, and He fought for us. This King does not demand sacrifices; instead He is the one who would sacrifice Himself for the salvation of all people.

For "In him there is no violence, no armor, no power, no anger, no wrath. All these, you see, are proper for kings of this world. *But God's story is different*. Here there are only kindness, justice, salvation, mercy, and every good thing. In short, *Zechariah tells how the promised Messiah* dispenses the sweetness and the mercy of God. He is just, because He justifies. He is Savior, because He saves. These are qualities which no king could ever bring to his throne. They are qualities far greater than those which befit a man. Moreover, all of these properties are spiritual and depict a spiritual kingdom, which the coming and accession of this just King reveal. For He comes in humility, riding on a *donkey*." (LW 20, p.94)

For this is where God's story comes and meets our story. On the grand scale of things, God does not enter our world to be a part of your story. He doesn't come to be part of mine. That is simply the arrogance of our Old Adam speaking. If God needs to come and be a part of our life, then we would be the god. Instead it is the other way around: God takes us and incorporates us into His greater story. In this story God is not just a part of our story, He is our identity and our story. This story began when God made all things in 6 days including Adam and Eve. Our first parents fractured the story by introducing sin into it. Yet it was not over. Noah was part of God's story of salvation. Abraham was part of God's story of salvation. Moses was part of God's story of salvation. David was part of God's story of salvation. Each was carried along as God directed them and gave them strength. Each points ahead to the climax story. And this story is not over yet.

You see, God's story told through Zechariah was not just talking to the nation of Judah or Israel. God's story includes all people. The salvation the messiah king would bring is for all people, all nations, all sinners trapped as prisoners to sin, death, and the devil, including you and me.

Zechariah gives us a snapshot of the wonderful Gospel story. The even better part is the messiah king has come. Christ Jesus, the Word incarnate, God who took on our flesh, has come. He rode into Jerusalem exactly as Zechariah was inspired to write. The Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the Son of Mary, the Son of God has come. Jesus, the Messiah, brought release from the prison we were locked in. Jesus, the Christ, brought the salvation foretold to Eve in the Garden, and repeated through the Old Testament. Jesus the Prophet, Priest, and King brought the sacrifice for the New Covenant to be sealed in His blood for the forgiveness and salvation of the world.

For over a millennia the nation of Israel had offered sacrifices and burnt offerings to God. They knew they needed forgiveness for their sins and only really had one option. They offered sacrifices on the altar of the Lord and for all the sins of the nation once a year in the holy places. But, as the author of the Book of Hebrews says, when Jesus came, He **"entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."**¹³ **For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh,**¹⁴ **how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**¹⁵ **Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant."**(Hebrews 9:12-15)

In short, Christ earned the of the world salvation with His own precious blood and innocent suffering and death. He paid for all sins, whether we think they should have been paid for or not. He paid for all sins, whether we believe in Him or not. He ransomed all people, paid the price for their salvation, whether they believe it or not. It is a travesty of the highest order that so many flush Christ's free gift of salvation away through unbelief.

But you may rightly ask, what does this mean for me today? Since Christ came, died, rose, and ascended, what happens now to God's story? Very simply, it continues. God's story, the one we now live in, kind of ends, when Christ returns in glory to on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead. That is not to say that we will then cease to exist, rather that then we, along with all who believe in Christ, will be resurrected to eternal life with Christ.

So how and where do our story's and God's story meet? They meet in Christ and the New Covenant He established in His own blood. Our story, our salvation, our inclusion into God's story begins when He drowns us and joins us to Christ's death and resurrection in the waters of Holy Baptism. There you are marked as God's own, delivered from death and the devil, forgiven of all your sins, and given eternal life in Christ. There the Holy Spirit incorporates you into the body of Christ, the body of all believers from Creation to when Christ returns in glory. God continues to breathe His life into you as you continue to hear His Word, His story, His salvation in your place. Then also, God joins you closest to Him and the communion of saints this side of the resurrection as He feeds you Christ's own body broken and blood poured out for the forgiveness of all your sins; for your salvation.

This Gospel story is not about us finding to God or inviting Him into our lives; rather it is about God finding us and bringing us into Christ's. It is not about us escaping hell, rather it is about Christ delivering us out of hell by His actions alone. It is not about us finding salvation, rather it is about Christ bringing salvation through His Word and Sacrament to breath eternal life into our dead souls.

The story of our salvation was completed on the cross, and it looks forward to its fulfillment at Christ's return on the Last Day. This story of the Gospel may sound like foolishness to the world around us, but to us who believe it is the power of salvation. We are called, and given the divine privilege to be able to share God's story of salvation. As it is God's free gift, we are encouraged to share it, so they too can be part of the story, for the salvation of those who don't yet know it. In this good news there is rest for the weary and broken soul. In Christ's shed blood is the salvation for the sinner, the forgiveness for the unforgiveable, life for those dead in sin. Christ, the Word made flesh, the story of salvation is the Good News this dying world need to hear. Christ is our stronghold. Christ is our life. Let us go forth and celebrate that new life each and every day with all those God has placed around us. Let us share the story of Christ crucified and the salvation and peace He brings through it. Let us rejoice in this story for we are all part of it by the grace of God. Amen.

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