

**“Why Do You Have A Smile On Your Face?”**  
**Palm Sunday – April 13, 2025**  
**Zechariah 9:9 & Psalm 103:1-5 & Luke 19:28-40**  
**Preached at Messiah Lutheran, Joliet Illinois**  
**by Pastor David Nygard**

All Bible passages are taken from the New International Version (NIV)

**Zechariah 9:9** Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! **Shout**, Daughter Jerusalem! **See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

**Psalm 103:1-5** <sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. <sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—<sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, <sup>5</sup> who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

**Luke 19:28-40** <sup>28</sup> After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup> **As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them,** <sup>30</sup> **“Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”** <sup>32</sup> Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup> They replied, “The Lord needs it.” <sup>35</sup> **They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: <sup>38</sup> “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”** <sup>39</sup> **Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”** <sup>40</sup> **“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”**

Grace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. Our sermon today is about joy. When I was in the seminary, studying to be a pastor, I worked in a hospital as a physical therapy orderly. One day a nurse asked me, “Why do you always have a smile on your face?” She caught me off guard. I said, “I don’t know. Just lucky I guess.” Here I am studying to be a pastor, and I am afraid to tell her the truth. I was ashamed

of myself. Three days later, I said, “You asked me why I have a smile on my face. Here's the reason. I am a Christian. Jesus lives in my heart. My smile comes from him.” She said, “I am a Christian too.” And that was that.

I don't know why I was afraid to tell her about my faith, but I was. Right now, you might be thinking, “I'm glad that we didn't hire Pastor Dave back then.” I had a lot of growing up to do. I still do.

This nurse was not asking me for a sermon. She didn't want my life's story. She just had a moment to hear me answer a simple question.

**I share this story for two reasons. #1) Most of us are afraid to share our faith.** We don't want to be rejected, bullied or teased. **#2) We're often afraid to express joy.** If we feel joy on the inside, we don't let our face show it.

We don't want anyone to think “He's full of himself.” “Who does she think she is, being happy?” In a cynical world, we are not comfortable being happy. Many people do not associate joy and happiness with being a Christian. They believe Christianity is nothing but slow hymns, many manmade rules, and long sermons. They're right about the sermons. But in everything else, they're wrong.

They regard Christianity as a religion. Jesus didn't come to give us a religion. Christianity is a relationship. He came to give us a personal relationship with him and God our Father. So many Bible stories are about Jesus stopping to talk with, listen to, and pray with real people just like you and me. Each one went home with a smile on his or her face.

**Would you go to a church where no one smiled? Would you believe someone who shared their faith with you, but had no smile?** No one smiles all the time, but something is missing if our relationship with God lacks joy. The prophet said, “...**the joy of the Lord is your strength.**” (**Nehemiah 8:10**), No joy. No strength: I remember a man asking me, “Help me find joy!” Maybe you feel that way?

I asked my aunt to tell me about my grandfather. I never knew him. She said “The first thing that I think of was his funeral. The pastor said

‘Charlie Anderson was a good Christian man. But he had no joy in his Christianity.’ How sad to be remembered for having no joy. How will people remember you?

Palm Sunday was a joyful day. It’s a rare moment in the life of Jesus when people loved, praised and celebrated their savior. Up until then there was always some cynic or jealous Pharisee trying to sabotage Jesus. Palm Sunday was different.

Palm Sunday began on the first day of Passover. People came to celebrate God setting the Israelites free from slavery in the Old Testament. It was a holiday.

Palm Sunday began with everyone looking for God to send them a Savior. That longing for the Messiah was in every Jewish heart.

Palm Sunday began with people wondering about Jesus. He preached like God whispered in his ears. They were thrilled by his miracles. His love came from the heart. Just the day before Jesus had gone to the tomb of his dead friend. He said “**Lazarus**” and Lazarus opened his eyes and left the grave behind. Who was this Jesus?

Palm Sunday began with Jesus telling his disciples to prepare for the day. It sounds like a spy movie. They were to visit strangers and ask them for a donkey. If the strangers wondered why, the disciples were to tell them a code phrase, “**The Lord has need of it.**” Hearing the code, the strangers provided the donkey.

Palm Sunday began with everyone remembering a Bible promise. 500 years before Palm Sunday Zechariah the prophet wrote, “**Rejoice greatly, ... Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**” (Zechariah 9:9)

Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey was a humble action. The kings of the world rode powerful horses or chariots. Jesus was demonstrating, “I am a different kind of king.”

The men, women and children who came to Jerusalem must have been camping outside. They saw Jesus so quickly. That's why we're having our Celebration service in the Family Life Center. It's like camping out. Did you bring s'mores?

When they saw the promised king, the crowds shouted "**Hosanna**" They cried "**Praise him!**" and "**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**" They waved palm branches like cheerleaders. I love when our Sunday School children parade through our service waving palms. We read that the kids of Jerusalem shouted "Hosanna" to Jesus until late in the afternoon.

Why were the Jews enthusiastic? Some of them must have seen when Jesus fed 5000 individuals with a few loaves of bread and fish. Maybe the man born blind but healed by Jesus was there. Perhaps Zachaeus the little man with no friends, who Jesus called by name, shouted his praise. Perhaps the woman caught in adultery but forgiven by Jesus cried, "Hosanna". Many were hopeful. No one really knew who he was until Easter morning. But on Psalm Sunday they were excited.

Why are we excited about Palm Sunday? It's because we're excited about Jesus. We love him because he first loved us. We praise him because we know the rest of the story. We know that Palm Sunday led to his painful death on Good Friday. We know that Good Friday brings the joy of Easter Sunday. Because Jesus lives, we will live also.

Our congregation knows from personal experience that Jesus is alive and active. He helped build this Family Life Center. When our fundraiser told me that we couldn't raise the two million dollars, I told him "Then God will have to do it." When we opened the doors, we were debt free without taking a loan. Who did that? Jesus did it.

He brought us through the craziness of Covid. We worshipped online when we had to do so. We worshipped with restrictions in church. We kept our distance. But we never stopped being a church family. Why? It's because Jesus never stopped being our Savior and our joy.

When the government threatened to close us down for something that we didn't do, we were stunned. They gave us three months to pay 487 thousand dollars or close our doors. We paid the fine 3 weeks early. Who did that? Jesus did it.

Our members have every kind of health and personal challenge. But our prayer chain brings our needs to God. Our volunteers work with the homeless. Our members provide meals for those in crisis. Together we've learned that God is good all the time. Jesus is working in our midst. If you believe it, say "Amen." Amen.

I say this about your challenges and mine and the future of Messiah Lutheran. God is not done with us yet.

**What will change our lives and bless our congregation?** What did Nehemiah teach? **"...the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10)** We need a smile on our face and joy in our hearts.

Only God can give us joy. Joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We can't create a smile by gritting our teeth. Either the Holy Spirit creates that smile, or it doesn't happen.

**Here are four ways that God can put a genuine smile on our face and give us joy.**

**God gives us joy when #1) We can personalize God's promises.** That's what I think happened on Palm Sunday. For 500 years the Jews heard this promise, **"See, your king comes to you, ... riding on a donkey."** For generations the Jews thought that the promise was for their nation in history. But then one day the crowds saw Jesus riding towards them. They realized that the "YOU" in the verse was them. The king was coming to them. Don't you suppose they had smiles on their faces?

Many Bible promises have the word "You". They were meant for someone else, but they were also meant for you and me. The king promised by God has come for "you" today... personally.

God promises in **Isaiah 43:1 "Do not fear, for I have redeemed (saved) you; I have summoned (called) you by name; you are mine."**

We feel joy when we personalize the verse. “God knows my name. He is my savior. I belong to him.” It’s hard to say it without smiling.

**God gives us joy when #2) We get with people who have joy and faith. Faith and joy are contagious.** We catch it from others. If our friends all gossip, we will gossip. If our friends drink too much, we will drink too much. But if we surround ourselves with joyful people, it will rub off on us.

If you want to experience happy people join the Sanctuary Choir. During choir practice we laugh. We joke. We pray for each other. We work hard. Every Sunday we share the good news about Jesus in music. There’s room for you.

If you want to know happy people join our youth group. There is always something fun going on. Join our volunteers who serve food at the homeless shelter. They go home tired but happy to make a difference. Some volunteers bring their children or grandchildren. Join our members who make quilts for the poor or memory bears for those who grieve. They laugh and make a difference. There’s room for you.

**God gives us joy when #3) We praise God and tell ourselves the truth.** Many of us find it easy to be negative. But we can find the good if we look for it.

The psalm writer found joy in counting his blessings. He tells himself  
<sup>1</sup> **Praise the LORD, ... all my inmost being, praise his holy name.**  
<sup>2</sup> **Praise the LORD, ... and forget not all his benefits—**<sup>3</sup> **who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,** <sup>4</sup> **...and crowns you with love and compassion...** (Psalm 103:1-5) It’s hard not to smile if your God is bigger than your problems. Count your blessings.

**God gives us joy when #4) We come to church more Sundays than when we stay home.** If you watch our service online, you are part of our church family. We love you. But if you can join us in person, please do so. If you worship with us most Sundays, you will change our congregation. We sing better when we sing with others. Our prayers move mountains

when we pray together. A church full of smiling people makes the stranger feel welcome. If just one of us stays home, our absence is felt.

**If someone asked you, “Why do you always have a smile on your face?”, how would you answer?**

The crowd on Palm Sunday praised Jesus with so much feeling that the Pharisees told them “Be quiet”. **“I tell you,” Jesus replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones (In the road) will cry out.”**

**I wonder why the stones in the road should have all the fun.**  
Amen.

The next time that I preach will be Good Friday and Easter Sunday.