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SERMON TITLE: Christus Victor: A Mighty Warrior
Walking as Disciples of Jesus Series

SCRIPTURE: John 12:12-16

DATE: April 5, 2020 Palm Sunday

Online service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Psalm 2:1-9. Online service at www.fpcd.org

Normally on this day we would have children in the sanctuary parading with Palm branches. Around and around they would walk while everyone sang the hymn we just sang:

Hosanna loud hosanna, the little children sang! . . . (v. 1)
The victor palm branch waving, and chanting clear and loud; (v. 2)
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to the King! (descant)

That hymn is a victory song for the King. Repeating the words shouted when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the hymn has been sung in churches for over 160 years, celebrating Jesus' victory ride. Luke tells us people kept spreading their cloaks on the road as Jesus rode by on a donkey. (Lk 19:36) That's what you did for a king. John describes it like this. READ Jn 12:12-16:

On the next day the great crowd that had come to the feast, having heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took palm branches and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, even as it is written: "Do not fear, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus had been glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.¹

That day, the week after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, we see how it symbolizes what Jesus does for us, too, even now in 2020. Jesus is fighting for us to bring us life.

That day had been predicted by Zechariah in the Old Testament about 500 years earlier: "Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and *victorious*, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey" (9:9). It speaks of this victory march.

A victory march is a declaration of someone as king. Once around 800 B.C., a new king was anointed. His name was Jehu and he was a warrior—a commander of the army. There was a terrible king named Ahab and God had chosen Jehu to bring an end to him. So the prophet Elisha went to Jehu, called him out of a meeting with his other officers, poured oil on his head, and

anointed him king as the Lord had ordered him. When the other officers were told what had happened, *they hurriedly took all their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, "Jehu is king."* (2 Kings 9:13).

In fact, Jesus was anointed by Mary, Lazarus' sister, six days earlier at a dinner party to celebrate Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. In fact, Jesus said, "She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial" (John 12:7). He knew who he was and what lay ahead.

Psalm 2, which was written around 1000 B.C., clearly predicts Jesus as the Lord's anointed one. God decrees, "You are my son. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." (2:7-8).

When we see people lining the road that day, spreading their cloaks and shouting praise to Jesus with palm branches, there is no doubt—they are proclaiming Jesus as King.

It was Passover. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that 2,700,200 pilgrims were in Jerusalem for Passover. That might be somewhat inflated but what we know is tremendous crowds were there.

Jesus was coming as "the King who saves." That's what hosanna means—"please do save!"

We know that day as the first day of Jesus' Passion. His mother was there. She was there all week, watching her mighty warrior. What a hard week it would be for her.

She knew everything about him, having been told by the angel Gabriel of his divine entry into the world; confirmed by her aunt Elizabeth when she was pregnant, the shepherds and magi when she gave birth, and Simeon in the temple when Jesus was circumcised. He took Jesus in his arms and prayed, "Master . . . my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:28-32). Anna, the prophet, spoke of him as the Messiah.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day as "the King who saves." This would be a week that changed the world forever—then, and now.

Why do we need this warrior King? I'm glad you asked.

Living in this nation, you have most likely heard that Jesus died for your sins. You have most likely heard that Jesus took your punishment, and if you receive him, if you believe in him in your

¹ Translation by Marianne Meye Thompson, the George Eldon Ladd Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary

heart, his death on the cross will cover your sins. This means you will not stand before God and have to explain every little (and big) bad decision where you went wrong; where you did not love God or others, where you lived for yourself and ignored God's principles. When your name is called there will be a big piece of tape over your sins with the name JESUS written on it. Because of that you will not face a trial; instead you will be exonerated, forgiven, and you will be given eternal life.

Jesus is your Redeemer. Jesus saves you from death. You pass through death to **life forever**—like Lazarus.

All of that is true. But there's more! There's a bigger picture, because there's also a bigger war that goes on in this world and in the cosmos.

Jesus is riding into Jerusalem as the Warrior-King to take on the enemy who robbed you of life in the first place.

Have you ever thought, why is there so much evil in the world? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why is this pandemic happening all over the entire world where people are getting sick, some are dying, and our economy is being destroyed? Why do people die?

There's a battle. The Bible calls the enemy spiritual rulers and authorities; powers and principalities. (Colossians 2) They are reflected in Psalm 2:

The kings of the earth prepare for battle; the rulers plot together against the LORD and against his anointed one. "Let us break their chains," they cry, "and free ourselves from slavery to God" (v. 2-3).

It's not just you and me who have a problem that needs saving. The whole world; the whole cosmos needs freeing from these diabolical powers and principalities that have brought sickness and death. The powers are filled with the desire to break the bonds of God and rule themselves. This rebellion permeates the systems and institutions of this world.

God says about his warrior king: "You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (Ps 2:9) God is warning the nations because nations must turn to the Lord and serve him.

Let's think about the warrior. A young man signs up for the military. In the past few years we have had several young people sign up for the military in this congregation. They train for war.

Let's say a military man is called upon to go to war. There's a battle raging somewhere in the world—it might be right here at home. Do you think they jump for joy when they are called up? No, of course not. But they have made the commitment. They have signed up. They have received training. It is a risk but long ago when they did sign up they determined to do it. And so they go.

They go with the intent to win even at the cost of their lives. What did America and the Allies do in World War II? Our nation

and warriors made the commitment to stand up against the most grievous evil, at great risk and the cost of many lives.

Battles are only won this way.

That's why Jesus says when you believe, *turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me*. Belief must have intent to follow.

We are also sheep who go astray and need a warrior who is a shepherd to rescue us so we can follow Jesus. Jesus is that Good Shepherd. Jesus will not abandon us when the wolf comes. Jesus, the begotten Son of God who came from heaven to defeat this enemy who is too strong for us, reaches down to rescue us. Then he helps us and trains us so we can stand strong.

Jesus led the way that day to victory. He was rescuing us like a Shepherd, and fighting our enemies like a warrior—Christus Victor. He was not going to lose, even at the cost of his life. There were many lives at stake, yours and mine.

Those people along the road, they were seeking this warrior king. To lay down their cloaks and to pick up a palm branch means acknowledgment of the king.

A few days later, another crowd would shout *crucify him*, desiring to break his bonds on them.

Which crowd are you a part of? The crowd with the palms? Then take up your cross and follow, receiving eternal life. Be wise.

The shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The warrior picks up his cross and takes on the enemy, even at the cost of his life. A commitment to follow him at all costs will bring the meaning in life you are seeking.

The other crowd desires to "free themselves from his rule," setting up their own rules. Its meaning evaporates—almost overnight, like so many things we think give value have evaporated in this pandemic.

Jesus' ride on the donkey this day expressed confidence in victory. God's king will save our lives! Forever! Hallelujah!

AMEN