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March 28, 2021
Sermon Text: Zechariah 9:9-10
The Triumphal Entry of Our Lord

HE WILL PROCLAIM PEACE

If we were to study great conquerors throughout history like Alexander the Great, Attila the Hun, Napoleon Bonaparte, or Hannibal, we could examine their military tactics or what kind of weaponry they used. They were conquerors and when they struck, they struck hard. It is said that today aside from a rogue 3rd-world nation that may get its hands on a nuclear weapon or engage in terrorism, the more likely way of conquest is if one nation neutralizes another nation's electronic capabilities. Even though it may not result in a single human casualty, it still would be a hostile act of conquest.

In the portion of God's Word we are contemplating today, from Zechariah chapter 9, we see that Jesus too is a conqueror. As a matter of fact, His conquests are far more extensive and longer lasting than anything we see among the other nations here on earth. But His manner of conquering is very different from them. In fact, Jesus extends His rule in a way no earthly ruler could. He does not employ military tactics or weaponry. His actions are neither hostile nor underhanded. Jesus conquers by proclaiming peace. By proclaiming peace He even intends to extend His Kingdom to you and to keep you in it. So today, let's ponder what it means that He will proclaim peace.

Zechariah was a Jewish preacher who lived around 500 B.C. He is quoted often in the New Testament. Zechariah preached to a people who had, shall we say, lost their mojo. After 70 years of living as exiles in Babylon, caravans of Jewish people were permitted to make the journey back to Palestine, back to Jerusalem. How they had longed for this day – to return to their homeland; to rebuild from the rubble what had been their home and their capitol city; to raise up from demolition a new temple to the Lord who had promised that the Messiah would come to them in that place.

At first they labored with great enthusiasm. There was cooperation. They donated their own energy and resources. But soon their enthusiasm waned. There was so much work to be done. It was overwhelming. And even as they laid the foundation of the new temple they could see that it would not be nearly as magnificent as the old one. In addition, they were continually harassed by local warlords who did not want to see Jerusalem become re-established as a city.

So the project stalled. They pretty much all retreated into their own individual lives and livelihoods. Zechariah's job was to reinvigorate them with God's promises to get them back to the project of rebuilding the temple. Through Zechariah God drew for them a vision of what was in store. God addresses the matter of surrounding nations and warlords. In essence, God says, "Don't you worry about those nations. I'll take care of them. But you've got to get back to building that temple." It could be said today that you are far richer than Bill Gates. Why? Because you have faith in Jesus. In the same way, God told the people through Zechariah that even though the new temple did not seem to compare with the original one, it'll be way more magnificent! Why? Because the long-awaited Messiah will come to this temple.

But even as I read God's promise to them, put yourself in the sandals of Zechariah's first audience. Does something about this message strike you the wrong way? Zechariah preached, *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey.*

Um, gentle? We're not looking for a king who's gentle. We want someone who can knock out our enemies. And riding on a donkey? How about a war horse or at least a prancing stallion?

When Jesus finally did come and physically rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, many of the Jews of His day had exactly that misgiving about Him. They were hoping for a military hero, a conqueror, who would set them free from the power of Rome.

But God doubles down on this description of the Messiah. He goes on to say through Zechariah: *I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken.* Hey, wait a minute! Won't we need those? How are we supposed to fend off the nations around us without weapons? What kind of king is this going to be? God continues: *He [the Messiah] will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.* So He will rule! But not with weapons. Rather He will rule by declaring peace! Clearly, a different kind of conqueror He will be.

Imagine if this King came at us barking orders like a military commander or seeking to crush us like a tyrant or even brooding over us from his office like an exacting CEO. Would He win our hearts? Our loyalty? Our adoration? Our enduring gratitude? Not likely. We'd try to get out from under His rule as soon as we could.

Instead, for many of us, Jesus came in the most gentle way and made us citizens of His Kingdom when we were only babies. The world took no notice of it. But Jesus made peace with us in Baptism. And what is that peace? He forgave all our sins.

You see, the peace of Christ is that God took all His fight to His own Son Jesus on the cross. God aimed all of His holy anger, His judgment, His punishment, His justice at Jesus as Jesus hung there. God aimed it all at Jesus so that He wouldn't have to aim it at you and me.

Now God declares peace with you and me. God says, "Put away all your roadblocks and weapons of defense. You no longer need to fight me, resist me, blame me, or avoid me. You no longer need to be at odds with me because I am no longer at odds with you. There is no reason for you to flee like a refugee of war. We are not at war, you and I. For I have forgiven all your sins. You and I are at peace with each other because of Jesus."

I'm so glad that Jesus came humbly riding on a donkey, like someone you don't need to be afraid of, like someone you don't need to impress. He is not surprised or put off by your sins. He atoned for them on the cross and He takes you as you are into His Kingdom. He brings you within the protection of His borders by declaring peace to you.

And when it comes to troubles or even death you have nothing to be afraid of. For God is in control of all things and you and He are at peace with each other. God is holding nothing against you. Through faith in Jesus you are under His blessing and ultimately you will enjoy the perfect peace, the perfect harmony of living within His house in heaven.

With this message of peace, Jesus works right under the noses of all earthly leaders and gains citizens to His Kingdom throughout the world – Russia, China, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ukraine, and yes even in Sun Prairie of Wisconsin of the United States of America – wherever His peace is proclaimed.

Zechariah wrote, *See, your King comes to you... gentle and riding on a donkey.* Today we could say, "See, your King comes to you gently in bread and wine, in His Holy Supper." The world takes no notice. Politicians and leaders continue vying for power and contest each other's right to rule. But under their noses, Christ speaks peace to you in this Sacrament, the forgiveness of sins, and your citizenship in His Kingdom is cemented evermore. All other nations in this world continually rise and fall until people no longer have a memory of

them. But this Kingdom of Christ that you and all believers throughout the world are part of will last for eternity.

He will proclaim peace. So many things there are in this life that threaten us, burden us, fight against us, hurt us or harass us –even within our own chaotic hearts and minds. May we always seek shelter under the rule of His peace. May His peace always be our salvation.