

Vs. 19: *“The Pharisees said to one another, ‘You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him.’”*

That which the Pharisees say to each other in anger and frustration is the very thing for which we pray, that the world would indeed go after Jesus. Yet this is hardly the case in our day and age. And so, interestingly enough, we Christians now stand in the place of these Pharisees, yet say just the opposite, “Look, the world is not going after Jesus.” And perhaps we are just as frustrated as were they.

But can we blame the world? In our text, the world has a very good reason for going after Jesus. He had just raised a dead man, Lazarus, to life. A crowd of people were eyewitnesses to this miracle. No wonder the world was going after Jesus. Our text even says that this sign which Jesus did is the reason. And we thought they came out on Palm Sunday simply because they loved Him so much.

Now it is true that the world goes after that which it loves. Money, power, fame and popularity. These are surely loved by many in the world because there are many who pursue these things. Our Declaration of Independence tells us that we have the fundamental right to pursue happiness. So, go after that which makes you happy. If that happens to be Jesus, fine. But judging by what we see in the world, most people pursue hedonism, the going after pleasure even while avoiding that which is painful.

Jesus is the opposite of a hedonist. He pursued the painful path to Calvary, refusing to serve His own pleasures. And in matter-of-fact language He says that anyone who wants to pursue Him must follow the same path. Is it any wonder, then, that the crowd who went after Jesus on Palm Sunday was nowhere to be seen on Good Friday?

But is it any different today? Good Friday is the painful reminder that our sins nailed Jesus to the cross, and few gather for worship. Yet Easter is one definition of pleasure, and many are willing to gather together.

What do you go after? Would the Pharisees have seen you with that crowd going after Jesus on Palm Sunday? Would you have gone after Jesus as He walked the road up to Calvary? We want to say Yes, but in our heart, we are not so sure. And for good reason. Because on a day-to-day basis, we are not all that good at going after Jesus. We go after Him when it is convenient, when nothing else more important gets in the way. But this should, and perhaps does, make us stop and ponder if we really do love Jesus as much as we say we do.

What is truly sad is that we can understand why the world today does not go after Jesus, but a baptized Christian? Jesus raised us to life in our baptism. And this sign and miracle is greater than the raising of Lazarus. So, if the world went after Jesus because of Lazarus, then nothing should keep us, who were raised with Christ in baptism, from going after Him.

You want the truth, don't you? Then here it is. Going after Jesus is not how we become and remain Christians. Instead, it's Jesus who goes after us. *“The Son of Man came to seek and to*

save that which is lost.” The lost sheep does not go after the shepherd. The Shepherd goes after His sheep who is lost. All of Scripture testifies to this truth. The prophet Zechariah wrote the words for Palm Sunday, “*Behold, your king is coming to you.*” We do not go after our King. He goes after, and comes to, us.

On a donkey no less. He comes humbly. He comes to serve; to serve our needs. He comes to die; to die for us; to bear the punishment we deserve. This is why Jesus pursued the cross. His eyes were fixed on it. Nothing could keep Him away. He went after the cross like a mother hen going after her chick trapped in a fire. Saving her chick and being burned alive doing so.

Jesus knew the fire that was awaiting Him. The fire of hell, God’s wrath. But no hesitation. He went after the cross, and in doing so, He went after you. Your name was on His lips as He prayed from the cross, “*Father, forgive them.*” And He did not stop there. Jesus pursued you from within the water of baptism to make you His forgiven one. And He still goes after you because, if you are like me, you wander away from Him and become lost so easily. The fact that you are here today, where Jesus is giving His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, is proof that He still goes after you.

Now do not, do not be a Pharisee here. Just before they said, “*Look, the world has gone after Him,*” they said to each other, “*You see that you are gaining nothing.*” This means, “It’s useless!” This is what they are saying about the world going after Jesus. There are some today who think this way. “It’s useless for Jesus to go after me. I’m too far gone. I’m not worth it. It’s utterly useless.”

Friend, never think this of yourself or of your loved one. Never believe that you are too far gone or that your loved one is too far gone. That it’s useless for Jesus to go after you. Romans 8 tells us how it is. Nothing, nothing, nothing can separate us from God’s love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Don’t tell Jesus that it’s useless. Would you tell a mother hen that dying for her chick was useless? Then don’t tell Jesus that dying for you was useless, that baptizing you in His own name was useless, that giving you His precious body and blood Sunday after Sunday is useless. He does not believe that for a minute.

There is no one more precious to Him than you. There is no one more forgiven than you. Yes, you. He forgives you for not going after Him so well. He forgives you for all that useless talk. Each one of you is forgiven. Jesus’ cross declares it to you. Your baptism into Him seals it.

This is Palm Sunday. Holy Week has begun. The world that was going after Jesus is no longer. Even you and I fail to go after Him. Do not fear. Do not despair. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Jesus. And so He, my friend, will never stop going after you. Amen.