

John 12:12-19

We could not acquire a donkey for Jesus to ride on this morning. And actually it would not have been practical. We would have had to cover the carpet with something because, you know, donkeys make messes. And they're stubborn. Who knows where it would have gone in here? And it might have been loud. It certainly would have been smelly. No, it really would not have worked well at all to have Jesus come riding in here on a donkey today. So it's a good thing He did not give us this command, "*Go and secure a donkey for Me.*" He gave this command on the first Palm Sunday. He told two of His disciples to go and bring a donkey for Him. But that command was only for them and on that particular day. Nowhere in Scripture does Jesus command His church to have donkey processions so He can come riding to His people. If He did, we would have them. But He doesn't.

Instead, He commands the very thing we do. He commands baptism. No donkey for Jesus today...water. Water and the Word of God is the donkey Jesus commands His church to secure for Him. Rather than commanding two random disciples to fetch a donkey, He commands the two who are called "father and mother" to bring their baby to the church where Jesus comes riding to their child on the water and word of Holy Baptism.

A poor little infant would be terribly frightened by a donkey coming toward him or her, even with Jesus riding on it. But in Holy Baptism it's not the child, but the devil who is frightened and driven away as Jesus rides into our hearts and lives on the donkey of water and word.

Now there are those who object. They disagree that baptism actually delivers Christ. Not because the Bible agrees with them, but because it does not make sense to their human logic--nor ours for that matter. On the first Palm Sunday, the crowd saw a man riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Human logic did not tell the people that this was the Messiah, the Promised Savior. It took faith to believe this. And it still does today. To disagree with baptism, to deny it, to reject it, to refuse it is not of faith, but is the pattern of unbelief. If I do not believe in the Jesus who comes riding to me on the water and word of baptism, then I simply do not believe in Jesus. To reject baptism is to reject Christ, because Jesus only comes to us on His donkey.

Today is Palm Sunday, and so we see palm branches before us. The children, with palms in hand, led the servant of the Word to the baptismal font where the Holy Gospel was delivered. How very fitting. The palm tree, in the desert, is the mark of an oasis. Travelers who are weary and thirsty, who see palm trees off in the distance, are given hope because an oasis is just ahead where there will be water, and shade, and relief. And so the Gospel was read today on Palm Sunday at the symbol of our oasis. In your baptism there is the water of life for your weary soul. In baptism your sins are forgiven. In baptism you are given new life in Christ. No matter where you are in the desert of your life, no matter how far you have strayed away, there is, for you, always the oasis of your baptism. Do not ever think to yourself, "I am too sinful...I am too weary, too stressed...I have strayed too far." Who do you think appreciates an oasis more--the traveler who is not all that weary or thirsty, or the traveler who is so weary, so thirsty, so stressed with life that he feels as if he is on death's doorstep?

Your baptism does not reject you if your sins are too great, if you have said and done terrible things, if you have stepped out on your spouse, if you have been a failure at being a Christian. You can reject your baptism, and sadly many do, but your baptism will never reject you. The waters of this oasis will never say, "Get out! Get away from me! You are too covered with sin and filth!" Never will your baptism say this. Rather, every day it welcomes you, it invites you, it urges you to return to its cool,

forgiving waters. It's because Jesus is in baptism. Baptism is Christ. And since Jesus never rejects you, you can always return to Him in the oasis of your baptism.

The reason why your baptism is such an oasis is that Jesus made it an oasis for you. On Palm Sunday He rode on the donkey because He was heading to the cross. He did not turn tail and ride in the other direction. He rode on the donkey toward suffering and brutality, severe punishment and bitter death. He did this because of our sinfulness, because we have said and done terrible things, because we have been unfaithful to those we love, because we have been failures at being Christians. If you take your sins lightly, if you think nothing of a little disobedience on your part, nothing of being a little selfish, a little unfaithful, a little bit proud, then look at what your sinfulness cost Jesus. He did not take our sins lightly. The penalty was severe for Him. We cannot, we dare not go through Lent without pondering the sufferings of our Lord. That donkey should have carried us to the cross, carried us to bitter death, yes, to death in hell. But Jesus chose the donkey for Himself, not for you. For you He chooses water and word. He who rode to the cross on a donkey, now rides from the cross to you in your baptism, yes, and in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. He rides to you this very day to comfort you, to forgive you--and He does forgive you. He rides on His Sacraments to you not with punishments and death, but with life and every blessing.

Today is Palm Sunday. Here are the palm trees. Here is your oasis. For here is Baptism, and the Word, and the Lord's Supper for you. Here is Christ with forgiveness and eternal life, and with all His gifts. Each week that you come to this oasis you are truly blessed. Amen.