

John 12:12-19

If the Pharisees had been given a glimpse into the future, they would not have expressed such anger here. “The world has gone after (Jesus!)” they cried out in frustration. But looking around today, this is hardly the case. The world goes after the next American Idol. It goes after famous celebrities and high-paid athletes. The world goes after a \$640 million jackpot, but it does not go after Jesus. People across the country formed lines going around the block at convenient stores selling tickets Friday, but I doubt if the line was very long coming into the church this morning.

Had the Pharisees simply chilled out for awhile, their anger and frustration would have eventually cooled down. The lottery jackpot was huge that day--Palm Sunday. Jesus had recently raised Lazarus from the dead. Crowds were lining up. They were all thinking of what they could do if they won the jackpot. “With Jesus in my grasp, I would have a great life! He could heal me when I get sick. He could even raise me up from the dead like Lazarus!” Jesus was the jackpot and everyone wanted a piece of Him.

But you know what happens to jackpots. After last week’s excitement the lottery fever will come to an end. No more crowds lining up to buy tickets. No more office pools with all the workers relating how they would quit their jobs. It’s back to business as usual. And that also is what happened after Palm Sunday. The crowds went home. They went back to work. Their excitement cooled down. The world stopped going after Jesus.

But that never was God’s design in the first place. He did not send His Son so that the world would go after Him. He sent His Son to go after the world. Sinners do not go after God. Instead, they flee from God like Adam and Eve in the Garden. They hide their faces from Him. They say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!” rather than face the God who made them. Sinners do not go after God, but God goes after them. Not to punish. Not to destroy. But to lay down His life for them.

And so on Palm Sunday it looked as though all the world was going after Jesus. But if you cut through all the excitement, cut through all the curiosity-seekers, all the “here today, gone tomorrow” followers, what really was taking place on Palm Sunday is this--Jesus, the Son of God, was going after the cross. Because to go after a world full of sinners, to go after you, He had to go after a hard, splintery cross.

The devil had offered Jesus a mega-billion-dollar jackpot. “All this can be yours!” he told Him on a high mountain. But Jesus refused to buy into it. He was not after luxury. He was not after fame and glory. He was after a path of suffering ending with crucifixion because Jesus was going after you.

What Jesus does is the exact opposite of what we do. Maybe you did not go after the lottery jackpot last week. Maybe you do not go after celebrities and famous sports figures, but because we are filled with sinful thoughts, every day we go after what we should not have. We go after what we want, not what we need. We go after a better life, but not a life that seeks to honor Christ. We go after what the world offers, not what God promises and gives in His Word and Sacraments. If we gave out one hundred dollar bills here each Sunday, we would never have an empty seat. But because God gives you what you need here, the world turns away and goes after other things on Sunday mornings.

Today is the first day of Holy Week. The meaning of the word ‘holy’ here is to be ‘set apart.’ This week is set apart from all the other weeks of the Church Year because this week, more than any other, proclaims what God did--the great lengths He took--to go after you. He chose a donkey on which to

ride into Jerusalem; a beast of burden, because Jesus, Himself, would become that beast carrying the heavy burden of the sins of the world. Jesus chose to enter a garden on the night He was betrayed because mankind once fell in a garden. And so Jesus, in a garden, would take the place of sinful mankind. Jesus did not defend Himself in Pilate's Court against those who accused Him because He was defending you by becoming the Accused in your place. And Jesus did not come down from the cross as His mockers urged Him to do, because He was enduring the torments of hell for you.

And even after going after the cross in this way, the world still does not go after Jesus. Even though the King of Glory, the God who made heaven and earth went after a cross to hang there and die for every wretched sinner, this wretched sinner goes after everything else in life except Jesus. And so do you.

But listen...Jesus did not go after the cross to receive our high thanks and praise. He did not lay down His life so that He would be the talk of the town. He had nothing else in mind except bearing the curse you deserved for your sins, so that your Heavenly Father now calls you forgiven.

And that is why you are here today. Not to win a lottery. Not to gain the things the world offers. You are here because Jesus goes after you. He draws you here to His Baptism for you where, just as He raised Lazarus from the dead, He also raised you from death to life in Him. He draws you here to His living words through which He gives you what you need--His eternal gifts. He draws you here to His Supper in which His body crucified for you and His blood shed for you is given here to you.

Jesus goes after you to bring you here because day after day you and I are going after the wrong things and we need His forgiveness. And friend, it's yours. Your sins are forgiven. This is God's sure word to you. There is no chance involved here. This is no lottery drawing. There is no work of yours that must be done. God's mercy here is for all of you, and it is a sure thing. There were only three winning tickets on Friday, but Jesus died for every sinner, and so God declares all sinners forgiven. He declares you forgiven. You, who have been going after all the wrong things in life, you are forgiven.

We should not look upon this as a license to sin. To come up to Christ's Supper and take His body and blood, but having no desire to change our sinful ways, is to reject Jesus; to reject His forgiveness. Just as this week is set apart, so are you. You are Christ's holy people set apart from the world to live, not according to your sinful desires, but according to your new life in Christ. He now lives in you. And He will help you and strengthen you to go after what you need in life--what He promises and gives to you. All the world is going after everything but what they need in Christ Jesus. But you, you who are set apart from the world in your Baptism, Jesus goes after you, and working in you, will help you go after Him. Amen.