

“Is it I, Lord?”

Matthew 26 & 27

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die. O Christ, Thy triumphs now begin o'er captive death and conquered sin. In lowly pomp ride on to die. Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain, then take, O God, Thy pow'r and reign. Ride on to die. So begins the most hallowed week in your entire year. This week is for repentance, for reflection, even for rejoicing. Yes, daughter of Jerusalem, child from the city of peace, rejoice. Rejoice because the Lord comes riding on a donkey and not a war horse. The King comes to die a criminal's death. Rejoice.

2 In the midst of this week, don't hesitate to ask the same question the apostles asked one after another when they heard that one of them would betray their Lord. “Is it I, Lord?” Even the apostles, the ones chosen and called by name by the Lord, even they doubted their ability to remain faithful. Learn from them to make confession, to ask: “Is it I, Lord?” It could be, couldn't it? You could be Judas. You grow weary with the seemingly slow pace of things, you chafe under the yoke of the Lord's authority, preferring to be your own boss, to do things your own way. You prefer silver coins to the Lord's companionship. You could be Peter, faithful one minute until faithfulness to the Lord became the dangerous thing to do. You could be the fair-weather follower, content to go along with Jesus until self-sacrifice was necessary. You could betray the Lord. You could master the white lie, could give in to your addictions and compulsions, could subdue your conscience. You could be Pilate, could be in the crowd, calling for Barabbas, crying “Crucify Him!”

3 So learn to confess. “It is I, Lord. I am the sinner. I have lived as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. My Lord's name I have not honored; my worship and prayers have faltered. I have not let His love have its way with me, and so my love for others has failed. There are those I have hurt and those I failed to help. My thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin. I do like not who I've become.” Confess and then rejoice in Holy Week. The King rides on to die. His triumph over captive death and conquered sin now behold as He rides into Jerusalem.

4 The answer to the question is altogether different if you ask it of Jesus. When you ask yourself, “Is it I?” you get the answer you don't want. But when you ask the Lord, “Is it I, Lord?” He answers “No. It is not you. It is I.” He didn't ride into Jerusalem to die a criminal's death because you deserved it. His faithfulness isn't the result of your fidelity. He loves you in spite of yourself. “It is I,” He says, “I am the one convicted by the Law,

sentenced to die, the punishment for all sin.” Through His death, you receive life. By His condemnation, you receive forgiveness.

5 The Prince of Life gave His life so that the murderer Barabbas could go free. The sinless Son of God died so that the sinner could be reconciled to God. So you go free. You are not the one condemned to die for your sin. No sin was not paid for by the death of Jesus Christ. Even Peter’s denial, even Judas’ betrayal, even Pilate’s faithlessness, even the crowd’s hatred, even your sin. All these were nailed to the cross with the Lord. When He died in the place of sinful humanity, death’s curse was reversed. Sin’s power was shattered. And the devil’s claim to you was overturned.

6 Sing hosanna this week. Rejoice in Him who came to deliver you from your captivity to sin and from the bondage of death. Rejoice in Him who would not leave you to pay the penalty for your own sinfulness. Rejoice in Him who came riding on a donkey. Rejoice that He came to claim you as His own in the waters of Holy Baptism. Rejoice that He who came riding into Jerusalem humbly on a donkey comes today to His altar, humbly under the forms of bread and wine. Rejoice that the Crucified Lord is the Risen Lord. Rejoice, even in Holy Week. Rejoice that the same Lord is the One who will return. The night will soon be ending.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Pastor Jeff Hemmer
Hope, Jerseyville
Palm Sunday, A✠D 2008