

Palm Sunday  
03/24/2013  
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church  
John 12:12-19  
David McMinn

I bring you grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Gospel according to Saint John the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter.

There's a line in a movie that I've quoted before that I'd like to present you again today. The actor whose task it is to play the devil speaks it. The quote is "Vanity, it's my favorite sin." Now usually when we think of vanity or someone being vain we think of someone who stops and gazes into mirrors on a regular basis. We think of people who think they're better looking, or smarter, or of better class, or more athletic than everyone else. Whatever, it could be a million things that shows vanity. They're people, who paraphrasing Carly Simon, "Are so vain that they probably think this song is about them." Substitute 'sermon' for 'song' in that line and we might be on the right track.

But vanity isn't always so blatant as Ms. Simon sings it. Webster gives several definitions three of which I give you now. 1<sup>st</sup> definition of vanity is "having no real value", the 2<sup>nd</sup> is "having or showing undue or excessive pride in one's appearance or achievements" and the 3<sup>rd</sup> is "to be silly or foolish". With those definitions in mind:

The other day I was listening to a minister on the radio preaching on the vanity of TV and radio preachers. He was talking about guys like Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar and Paul Crouch. His major beef with them was that they preach a

prosperity gospel or a 'name it and claim it' religion. They preach that if you do certain things God will reward you with earthly riches and health and prosperity and happy families. This minister also didn't like their constant emphasis on a person's esteem saying that self esteem is antithetical to biblical theology.

To him these guys and the many more of their ilk are leading people astray to a religion that doesn't concentrate on Christ and His Work. Rather they concentrate on God's supposed temporal blessings as though what happens here in this life, apart from salvation, is the important stuff. To him the preachers were vain and their religion was vanity. They thought too much of themselves and their appearances and their religion was useless and even silly and foolish.

And I must tell you to this point I'm in agreement. They do think too much of themselves and what they've accomplished and their religion is useless and could be considered silly and foolish if it weren't for the fact that they're leading people astray. Their faux Christianity is dangerous and blasphemous. To this point, and on these subjects, I was in agreement with the minister.

But then he said something like this, "I have never promoted myself or a religion of self esteem. Everyday of my life I have stayed faithful to God and His Word. I have never preached such a false Gospel." And he went on in such a manner for quite a while. But in the course of doing so he never talked about the sacrifice of Christ saving him. He never spoke of himself as being a sinner in need of forgiveness every bit as much as the TV preachers. Instead he talked about how he'd remained faithful to God. "Vanity, it's my favorite sin" says the devil.

In the Gospel for today we see Jesus headed into Jerusalem from Bethany where He'd raised Lazarus from the dead. The crowd following knew of this miracle first hand. They were there. The crowd meeting Him in Jerusalem heard what He did. They too wanted to come out and see this man who did such great things.

*“The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”*

The Apostles going along with Jesus heard Him say He was going to Jerusalem to be handed over and killed. They did not understand it when Jesus said that, but they didn't understand this jubilation for Jesus by the crowd either. Why were these people so enthralled with Jesus? Why were they acting this way?

It was simple: the crowd following Him saw the sign He'd done with Lazarus and the crowd coming out to meet Him heard about the miracle. A man who raised people from the dead must be great. A man like that is a man people want to hitch their life to. If He can raise the dead, what else might He be able to do? Why, we've heard before that He's fed the hungry, healed the sick and made the blind see and lame walk. Now He's raised a man from the dead. What are the possibilities for us through Him?

But they don't understand why Jesus comes. They didn't understand any better than the Apostles that Jesus was coming to die. Their thinking was vain, it was foolish and silly. It was based on them thinking about self and what Jesus could do for them in this life. Vanity, the favorite sin of humans too.

We're so easily trapped by it. And even when we try to be pious and holy, the moment we think we are it's vain and vanity. If the thought ever crosses your mind that you're doing alright then into vanity you've plunged headlong. It's never about us it's always, always about Christ and His work. If you want self encouragement and self salvation there's plenty of other religions that'll do that. But if you see no hope within yourself then this is the place. Yet we easily, so easily fall back into vanity.

Do you call upon God when you get yourself in a jamb you can't get out of? Money doesn't stretch quite far enough so you cry out? Maybe you call upon Jesus when you're sick, health is failing and you need deliverance from your affliction. You pray that God would return your children back safe to you from a trip. You pray that your business would continue to make money and

support you or that retirement funds would last you or that your government and economy would hold together so the country will survive or that we not get involved in any wars that endanger you. You ever pray for things such as these? If you do, good! You should.

These petitions and those like them fall up under the idea of daily bread in the Lord's Prayer. "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" And so we do pray them. **But** if these prayers and those like them are the extent of your prayers then you're more familiar with vanity than you should be. You're like the crowds that followed Jesus in our Gospels for today. To think that the things of this life are primary is vanity.

There was one person in the crowd that day who was not practicing vanity. There was One who had every right to be vain and yet wasn't. Christ hears the crowds as they cheer His name and praise Him. He feels the adoration of the peasant and the noble as they throng about Him wishing to get a glimpse or maybe even touch Him. And yet He knows their thinking isn't clear. Yes He's the King of Israel, it's right to praise Him but not in the sense that He was about to ascend to an earthly throne. Instead Jesus would be high and lifted up. It would be a cross and at the expense of His life. It would be His life given up for our life.

Jesus plods along on that donkey in the rejoicing crowds knowing that He was about to die for all these people, these fans. Yet these adorers and admirers would be absent from the scene as He hung there on the cross being

the King He was meant to be. He would die apart from the gaze of star struck fans, alone and naked upon the cursed tree.

And yet as bad as it looked His death was anything but vain. He wasn't practicing vanity. His desire was never for Himself or His worldly comfort. His designs were always that He would die for you. That He would rescue you from your focus on self and what's in this life for you. He would by His life, death and resurrection free you from the chains you forged by your own sinful works and thoughts. The One who has every reason to be vain is anything but.

The best we can do is to ask God for forgiveness for our short sightedness, our inward grazing, our lack of compassion for our neighbor and our lack of understanding for what God gives us in Christ. Too much of the time we like the Apostles don't understand. We don't get it.

But don't think you're beyond help. That too would be vanity. Instead receive the forgiveness Christ marched to His death to earn for you. Open your eyes and see that in this life we're to receive the forgiveness that Christ has for us. We receive the service He rendered unto us and in turn we serve our neighbor.

Life is lived in vanity if we live it apart from Christ. Life is also vain if we think that Christ is Lord and provider in this life only, that this life is our primary goal. Christ is our King in that He came to give His life for ours. Christ is our King because in Him we have life eternally. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.