

The title for today's message is: ***Good News / Bad News***

Paul said: ***Have this mind among yourselves,***

Grace and peace to you from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Hey, did you ever hear the one about when the guy says, "I've got good news and I've got bad news..."? Of course you have.

There's more than one. It's a classic vaudeville set-up line. Did you ever notice how when you look at the original events of Holy Week.

Yes the week we are starting today, what happened from Palm Sunday to Good Friday is almost like one of those "Good news and Bad news" jokes?

The good news is that Jesus Christ reached the peak of his popularity this week, riding in a triumphal procession into the holy city of Jerusalem.

There was a big, spontaneous parade, which was yet prophetically predicted in the Old Testament.

There were adoring masses, thronging crowds, everybody turned out, the disciples were very impressed.

And the Pharisees and the Sadducees realized that they had underestimated this simple Galilean teacher.

Riding this crest of public approval Jesus rode that donkey right to the Temple, the very center of the Jewish faith, and began to teach and preach.

From Sunday to Thursday Jesus was unstoppable. His enemies tried to trick him several times -- but to no avail; each time he turned the tables on them and exposed their treachery.

They thought about arresting him, but were afraid of what the people would do. No one even seriously complained when he overturned the tables of the money-changers.

And of course, in this same period Jesus set the tone for his church, washing his own disciples feet and telling them (and us), "Love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another." He instituted the Lord's Supper and provided us the power to be his disciples, doing his work, in this world.

Like I said, the good news is from Sunday to Thursday Jesus was unstoppable. So, what's the bad news?

On Thursday he was betrayed and arrested and on Friday he was hung on a cross and killed.

Today the palms - tomorrow the passion -- good news and bad news - but it's not a joke.

There's nothing funny about the fact that the same people who shouted "Hosanna" "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord," on Sunday shouted "Crucify him," just five days later.

Everybody's hero became an object of scorn and hatred, a bloody sacrifice. Is there anything we can learn from this?

Of course there is and it has been customary in looking for that lesson to focus on the experience of the people around Jesus and from what they say and do come up with a message that goes like this:

"Don't be like those who cheered one day and jeered the next. Don't wave your palm branches today.

Then forget all about Jesus and his or your mission tomorrow. Be faithful and see yourself as Jesus' loyal follower every day, every moment, of your life."

That's a good message - But, this morning, just for a moment, let's put ourselves in Jesus' place rather than in the shoes of someone around him.

So what was Christ's experience with all this good news / bad news from Palm Sunday to Good Friday?

Paul gives us good insight: Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.

But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

Did you hear that? "He made himself nothing, he took on the very nature of a servant, he humbled himself, and he made himself obedient to death."

These things remind us of something that's easy to forget when we're always put ourselves in the crowds' shoes on Palm Sunday, wondering "how could they?"

Paul's words here remind us that Jesus intentionally chose his path. He chose to leave the safety of Galilee.

He chose to confront the powers of darkness right where they were most powerful.

What this "choosing" means is that all the uphill, downhill, good news / bad news, palms one day, passion the next.

Had nothing really to do with what Jesus was about. He knew the purpose of his life to be that of Savior, not celebrity.

He knew saving required sacrifice, the sacrifice of not being able to do what he would have always preferred to do.

The sacrifice of living life for others, not for himself, and ultimately the sacrifice of himself on a cross that everyone else but him deserved.

He knew this was the only way for sinners to be saved and no issue of popularity or acceptance could deter him from it.

Jesus came to Jerusalem neither excited nor deceived by the applause of the crowds. He didn't allow himself to get depressed over the treachery, the desertion, the seemingly complete reversal of fortune he would endure.

Jesus knew what would happen to him, he even knew what would happen to others, like Judas and Peter and the rest of his disciples.

In both popular acclaim and in denial and rejection, Jesus made it plain to everyone that he was not swayed by the feelings or events of the moment.

But rather was walking step by step along a path which fulfilled the heavenly Father's will, for him and through him for all the world.

It didn't matter if the path seemed to reach a peak from which there was no way to go but down.

Jesus knew that his goal was not the top of the mountain, not popularity or power or applause.

It didn't matter that the path clearly led into, and appeared to end in, the valley of the shadow of death.

No, regardless of appearances, regardless of the popularity that Jesus found, and regardless of the suffering that he knew he would undergo.

Jesus chose to be true to his mission, he chose to be obedient; and he walked the path to its end.

And what happened? "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It is a lesson for all of us to remember. Or as Paul puts it, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

If we depend upon the mountain top events of life to give us reward and satisfaction, we may never achieve them, or we may have them snatched away in the very moment of tasting victory.

If we make money, or health, or security or even family the meaning of what defines us, we may, indeed, find ourselves with plenty of everything.

But what goes up, must come down. And even if you reach the top, that only leaves one way to go in the weeks and months and years ahead.

It like being on a roller coaster – there is a long ride to the top, but after you reach the top comes a rapid and scary descent.

On the other hand, we - like Christ - have the opportunity to walk our own unique path of obedience toward God.

It is a path which may see us surrounded by enjoyment, possessions, popularity, and the people of a loving family or it may lead us into loneliness, misunderstanding, and poverty.

But none of these things - good or bad - define or influence where the path is headed.

Whether this path is up hill or down hill, bad news and good news, walking it with the attitude of Christ Jesus, an attitude to faithful choosing, we realize it is the final destination that counts.

Because, after all, the journey from Palm Sunday to Good Friday wasn't just a good news / bad news joke.

There was the final good news which redeemed it and us all. Jesus rose from the dead on Easter.

And because of that God can take any situation - no matter how bad it seems, even if it is the day of our own death, and use it to move us closer to our final destination.

You and I are going to walk out of here this morning into many more sweet successes, and many more bitter disappointments.

What saves us from having to helplessly ride a roller coaster over these ups and downs, what frees us from the tyranny of events which could otherwise throw us off stride is faith in Christ Jesus.

His obedience, love and power urges us to press forward in our own obedience to God. Faith trust Easter is coming.

Faith knows that meaning in life is found when we choose to follow the path God has marked out for us, a path first followed by our Lord and Savior.

Through all that life has to offer and then through the grave into the eternal life of heaven.

May that blessed destination make a difference for you too, as you faithfully follow through ups and down, peaks and valleys, highs and low, good news and bad news.

Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.