

Zechariah 9:9-12

The people of the ancient city are lining the streets, they are standing on the rooftops. They are craning their necks to watch the King pass by on his war horse. He sits tall in the saddle, a crown upon his head, armor on his chest and shoulders, his sword on his hip. He looks determined, trying to show confidence to his people as he and his soldiers ride out to war.

Once the King passes by with the Honor Guard, then the marching lines of soldiers come into view. You recognize the butcher's son, still pockmarked with acne he's so young. Then comes your cousin and your aunt cries out that she loves him. A child breaks away from the crowd and rushes out because they just saw their father. The father breaks rank only to scoop her up, kiss her, and hand her back to his wife who is crying all the same.

Which of these will see their loved one's return? Who will still have a son, cousin, husband or father after the day is done? And as the soldiers march out the people wait. No text messages in the ancient world, no weekly calls when the soldiers are far afield. No report from the ground on how the battle goes. No newspaper to tell them which city was lost or gained. And so the people in the city wait.

Then the few guards left behind on the wall, swaying between guilt because they should be out fighting and relief because they aren't, they see a runner coming.

“Open the gates!” They yell. And the city once more gathers, clambers, to hear the news. “Victory or defeat?” Do they celebrate that their sons and husbands might still be alive or at least didn’t die in vain, or do they pack and flee to the mountains before the enemy army comes looting, pillaging, killing, and more.

Look at how much is riding on this news! More than any promotion you ever had, more than any diagnosis. This is not just about your life, it’s about your family’s, your friends, your town’s. your nation’s. Everything is riding on this! It’s slavery and death or liberty and life. It’s families and friends, or tyrants and abusers. It’s livelihood and future, or abject suffering and meaninglessness. What is the news of battle!?

Today from our text: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!”

The runner announces victory!

Imagine the tears, imagine the shouts and cries, the stress relieved. That person you held a grudge against, you’re hugging them, because nothing else matters. The poorest in the city and richest shout aloud together. The foreigner and the native bring out their decorations and best leftovers from the siege.

The King has had some business to attend to. Treaties to barter, prisoners to secure, wounded to thank and inspire, dead to honor. And so by the time he and the army

return to the city the decorations are out. Branches, cloaks, ribbons, and banners. A “thank you” for fighting valiantly for the people, for giving them their lives and futures back. And he approaches, not like he left. Not with armor and a war horse. No, He is victorious, his battles fought and won.

“Behold, your King is coming to you, righteous and having salvation is he!”

This is the joy of the King. Now I know we are on the fourth of July weekend and we aren't big on monarchs here in America. Because the problem with Kings is, pretty much all the time they are sinful people. There are good ones and there are bad ones and, especially in the ancient world, you just kind of hope you have a good one.

But here we proclaim that we do have a good King! The King of kings is no sinful man. He is righteous and he brings salvation! So even if the butcher's boy falls in battle, our King will raise him up. To a kingdom of peace, where there is no battle bow, or chariot, or nuclear arms race or drone strike.

Last night, fireworks were going off, and we will continue to watch our war movies. How often we glorify war! Will the Lord's kingdom, free of war, be some boring place to be? Before you answer, ask the military vet who hears something much different than just fireworks. Ask the butcher as his son marches off to war. See if they find hope in a King who puts an end to war.

But his peace, hope, and victory isn't just for them, its for those who have lost wars. "I will set your prisoners free... return to your stronghold O prisoners of hope! Today I declare that I will restore to you double." So for those who have the bad diagnosis, who don't get the promotion, who've attended the funerals, whose runner returned declaring defeat, who lost everything and fled to the mountains or were led away as slaves. There is hope in this same King who will make all things new.

But his peace, hope, and victory go even further. "He shall speak peace to the nations. His rule shall be from sea to (shining?) sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth!"

And don't miss the political climate of the ancient world, nations were not fond of each other. They had their king and their god, you had yours. And a generation ago they conquered your city and killed the butcher's son, and in this generation you killed their blacksmith's son. Enmity ran deep between different tribes and nations. Yet what does this King bring? Peace to all of them too! Even to that nation you despise.

We can hardly miss the political climate in our country today so perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves of this fact: our King came for all the nations. And we were not the first. He came to Israel, Christianity blossomed a world away, north Africa

was a bastion of Christianity, then Europe, only then did it fully blossom here, and now, let's be honest, it seems to have shifted, back to Africa and the Asia where millions and millions of Lutherans, let alone Christians, dwell even today.

But this is the work of the King. To bring his righteousness and salvation to the world that he made and loves. There are no borders in Christianity or for our King. There is no racism in Christianity, because he made only one race – human. It doesn't compute, it doesn't fit in in any capacity, it can't be shoehorned in. It's not in any of the covenants, even the ones with Israel because even they were covenants for the nations. It sure isn't found in the Savior that was for the World, nor is racism found in the Gospel that is for the gentiles, nor in the King that made us and shed his blood that flowed, like all of ours, red.

And that is precisely where my story of the King going off to battle falls short. Because it gives the impression that the soldiers fought to win the battle. But as we know on Palm Sunday, which this text prophesies, only One was going into Jerusalem to fight. Only the King. Only he fights sin, death, and the devil so butcher's sons and you and I can hear of the eternal victory he won for us – not with the sword, but with his sacrifice for us and his victorious resurrection.

Remember the joy the people of that city must have felt, let that be our Joy. We have a future - and I don't care how old you are. We have hope, forgiveness and

life! Every tribe, every nation, even us in this town in East Idaho have a King, one who fought for us and gives life! He gives us his righteousness for free, he gives us his salvation, for free. He fought the battle, he paid the price on the cross. Then showed his victory, that he already knew on Palm Sunday, on Easter when he rose again. He fought and won for you.

That is not to say we don't have our battles. We struggle we fight and as Paul reminds us in Romans 7, as if we needed any reminding, we fall short. We lose some of our battles, with temptation, prejudice, sin. But we keep fighting, why? Because the King tells us to. This King has won the ultimate battle, why would any of his commands seek to harm us? So if he tells you flank left, flank left. He tells us to put the shield up, put it up. "That commandment is so out of touch, Pastor." "No one does that anymore." "That isn't as inviting." I'm sorry, I thought we were at war against powers and principalities? I thought we were following the risen One? He has already shown his goodness, he has already shown his might, let us follow after Him and may the Holy Spirit help us in our weakness, may the armor of God protect us and may we learn how to use the Sword, the Word of God, we have been issued. Strengthen your arms, hone your skill, there is darkness in this world and in us, let us follow after the Light of World and let that light purge away prejudice, doubt, sin and fear.

And you may find something else remaining, the joy of our salvation. Joy brought about by the King who rides in victory, which means we have forgiveness, a future, and a share in His Kingdom which has no end. Amen.