

Charles St-Onge
Palm Sunday C
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Ride On, Ride On

**Ride on, ride on in majesty / Hark all the tribes hosanna cry
O Savior meek pursue thy road / with palms and scattered garments strowed**

They had seen something they knew was impossible. But their eyes told them a different story. They had watched their friend and neighbor die. They had seen the life force slowly ebb away from him, until he finally breathed his last. Then like a leaf falling from a tree in autumn, Lazarus was gone. If only the Rabbi had been here! He would have cured Lazarus as sure as he'd cured so many others. But he didn't get to Bethany in time, and now it was too late.

But it hadn't been too late. Not at all. With a shout and a look of concentrated determination, the Rabbi had spoken into the opened, stinking tomb. "Lazarus! Come out!" And there he was. This man who had been dead was now very much alive. After four days in the tomb!

Now the Rabbi marched on Jerusalem with his twelve disciples; one for each of the original tribes of Israel. Everyone knew why. What Jesus had done for Lazarus, he would now do for all Israel. This would be the end of Roman occupation. More than that, this would be the end of all occupations, forever! King David's successor would rule on the throne, Israel would be restored, and God's name would be hallowed forever! Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna to the one coming in the name of the Lord!

**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**

It was a game now. Wake up in the morning, and scurry down to the Temple to hear what might come next. So much better than the usual Passover, with all the tedious preparations, finding a suitable lamb, navigating the pressing, smelly crowds in this occupied city filled to overflowing. This time they had entertainment.

It was a game now. Gather in the temple courts, wait for the Rabbi to appear then wait for the Pharisees, Sadducees, lawyers and scribes to set the traps. Listen as one by one this Rabbi from Galilee disassembled the brightest minds of Judea.

"Who gave you authority to teach these things?" one lawyer yells out. "Who gave John the Baptist his authority?" Jesus shoots back.

"Is it right to pay taxes to the occupying forces with their idolatrous coins?" another shouts. "You mean the idolatrous coins you're carrying in your pocket right now? Why would giving them back to the one who made them be such a bad thing?" Jesus laughingly answers.

And the crowds loved it. It was a game...now, but not much longer.

**Ride on, ride on in majesty / the angel armies of the sky
Look down with sad and wond'ring eyes / to see th'approaching sacrifice**

The trial started early Friday morning, by Jewish reckoning, Thursday night by ours; the day of the Passover. Caught in the Garden, betrayed by one of his own. The Rabbi is dragged to a

hastily called gathering of the High Council of the Jews. It is dark – the time of shadows, when evil rules and the good too often run away in terror. The game is now over.

One by one his accusers present their case. One by one, his disciples disown him, adding to the first betrayal their own words of denial. “I never knew the man! I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

The hated Roman Procurator, despised by the people, distrusted by the Jewish leaders, is turned to for help. The irony is lost on them in their need to see this man die. They do not know what they are doing.

Pilate declares once: “I find no basis to charge this man.”

“He is a rebel!” the crowd cries, “He stirs up the people!”

Pilate declares a second time: “I find no basis to charge this man.”

“Give us Bar – Abbas,” they yell, “the one called ‘Son of the Father’”

Now Barabbas, Son of the Father, was a rebel, and did stir up the people

Pilate declares a third time: “This man is innocent.”

But his words are empty. What is innocence, after all?

He releases to the crowds Bar Abbas, Son of the Father

And hands the true Son of the Father over to be crucified.

**Ride on, ride on in majesty / thy last and fiercest strife is nigh
The Father on his sapphire throne / expects his own anointed Son**

This is the time of enthronement. This is the time when the Son of Man is lifted up. This is the time for the Son of Man to be glorified by his Father, to be nailed to his throne of wood, a tree lifted up to the sky for all to look upon and live. Here the Son of God will show the Father’s love, show in what way God so loves the world.

The first nail is the worst. All the way through the streets, the Rabbi, Son of God, born of Mary, wonders about that nail. What it will feel like when it’s driven home. He wonders whether the second nail will be easier or harder, and whether any of the nails will equal the pain of carrying the sin of the entire world.

Then it comes. His clothes are ripped away, leaving him spread out for all to see. The agony of the first blow, the unimaginable pain of the second, then the stretching out of his legs. “Father, forgive them, forgive them, forgive them.” At last the tree of death is lifted up, this Tree of Death that will replace the Tree of Life, lost so long ago. Here is new life being made for you and for me. A new start. A new creation. Here at the Place of the Skull is planted a new tree, a tree that shows just what is good and what is evil. A tree that will be for the healing of the nations, for the drying up of every tear, and for the taking away of every sorrow. “Look,” says the Rabbi, to you and to me and to all weighed down by the sin and evil of the world and our own lives. “Look, I make all things new.”

At last, the Passover sacrifice is accomplished. The debt is paid in full. The consequences of our evil have been laid on him, and he has born that evil to its completion. “Into your hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit,” he breathes. It is his last. The debt – your debt and mine – has been paid in full.

**Ride on, ride on in majesty / in lowly pomp ride on to die
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain / Then take, O Christ, thy power and reign.**