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(The outlines below are furnished by the Rev. Milton L. Rudnick, St. Louis, Mo.)

PALM SUNDAY

JOHN 12:12-19

Goal and Problem: To stimulate the worshiper to gather people to Christ by more intensive personal witnessing, and to overcome the reluctance to witness.

Introduction: Where did all the people come from on that first Palm Sunday? There was a great crowd (v. 12). One group came out from Jerusalem to meet Him, and another had paraded with Him all the way from Bethany. As they went through the streets of the city still others, attracted by the sights and sounds, streamed out of their homes and shops to join the singing throng.

What brought them out? What was there about Jesus and this occasion that could stir up such a demonstration on the spur of the moment?

Several factors come to mind. Jerusalem was a large city, and at this time it was overflowing with pilgrims who had come to the city to celebrate the feast of the Passover. Under such circumstances large crowds gather quickly whenever there's some excitement. Furthermore, Jesus was a popular figure. Almost everyone had heard of the strange prophet from Nazareth. In addition to genuine followers, a lot of curious on-lookers rushed out to see Him when they heard that He was in town.

However, our text mentions another significant reason for the crowds. A lot of people had been witnessing (v. 17). Those who had been present in Bethany when Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb had been talking to their friends and acquaintances about this astonishing event. They had stirred up interest in Jesus, and there is nothing like interest to attract a crowd.

Whenever crowds gather today to be in Christ's presence and to offer Him praise, it is also because the Holy Spirit has used the witness of men.

Why the Crowd?

I. *We should build the crowd of Christ's followers*

A. It is not for His own sake that Christ wants a crowd of followers. He does not crave applause and acclaim. He frequently avoided crowds.

B. However, in this case He accepted the crowd and may even have planned this rousing reception (Matt. 21:1-4). He welcomes a crowd whenever this enables Him to bless and to help more people. Not for His benefit but for the benefit of the crowd itself, He likes to see large numbers of people turn out to be with Him.

C. It is for this reason that we, too, should welcome and work for large crowds. Though we should not despise small numbers or even the opportunity to serve a single individual, we should not despise crowds, either. We should try to bring as many people as possible within reach of His Word and involved in His worship.

II. *Each one reach one*

Building a great crowd is easier than it may seem. One individual could not double the size of his congregation all by himself. However, if each member gained only one additional member, this very thing could be achieved. Something like this happened on the first Palm Sunday. No one person gathered that crowd. Individuals who had seen Jesus raise His friend Lazarus from the dead told other individuals, and they in turn told

a few others, so that when Christ came a great crowd was in the making. Do not set an unrealistic goal for yourself in this matter of witnessing. For the time being, let your quota be to do your part toward the conversion of just one person. If all or even most of us would do this, the crowd would grow tremendously.

III. *Tell what Christ has done*

What can you do that will bring even one person to Christ? What procedure or method should you follow? A very simple one: tell him what Christ has done. That's what these people did who built the crowd on that first Palm Sunday. Imagine how enthusiastically and earnestly they described the miracle that they had seen in Bethany. We have so much more to tell. His entire work of redemption is now complete—His great sacrifice of love upon the cross and His own resurrection from the dead. We can speak of the overwhelming blessings which His followers have experienced down through the centuries. In particular we can testify to the forgiveness, comfort, and hope which we personally have experienced through faith in Him.

IV. *Strive for a specific response*

After telling a person what Christ has done, and after explaining that he, too, can have a part of this, try to bring about a definite response on his part. Try to get him to attend church or Bible class with you. The great days of worship and recollection just ahead—Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, provide you with an outstanding opportunity to do this. Many people who do not ordinarily enter God's house feel themselves drawn on these days. Even those who may have refused your invitations in the past should be invited again. This time may be God's time to bring them in through the power of the Holy Spirit working in your witness.

V. *Repent of your hesitancy*

We all hesitate to witness—at least at times. Religion is a controversial subject. We are not as well informed about our faith as we ought to be. Perhaps, we think that witnessing is the sole responsibility of the pastor and the elders. The underlying reason, though, is probably that we simply do not care enough about our Lord or about the person we have in mind to try to bring the two together. Because we feel our own salvation is secure, we do not worry what might happen to someone else. For this we need the pardon of a merciful Savior. Before we can hope to improve our witness, we have to repent of our past neglect.

Conclusion: Throughout the world today thousands of people, perhaps even millions, are being confirmed. Day by day, year by year, the crowd around Jesus Christ grows larger. Some day all believers from every age will be gathered around our Savior and King to sing His praise, and once again, Scripture affirms, they will have palm branches in their hands. In the Book of Revelation, St. John describes this magnificent scene around God's heavenly throne. "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb.'" Why the crowd, we ask once again? The answer is the same: because someone witnessed. How many will be there because of your witness?

MAUNDY THURSDAY

MATT. 26:26-28

The goal is to encourage reverent and frequent participation in the sacrament which was instituted on this day and to

counteract the tendency to partake only occasionally or casually.

Introduction: Tonight we are celebrating an important anniversary. On this night some 1,900 years ago something very vital and precious was given to us Christians—the Sacrament of Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper, as it is also called. This sacrament is one of the great treasures of the church, and participating in it is one of our highest privileges as church members.

Our joy on this occasion is rather quiet and subdued, for we are nearing the climax of the season of our Lord's suffering. However, beneath this restraint the mood is one of solid relief and victory. For the suffering and death which He endured were *for us*, so that we might have the pardon, strength, and hope which this sacrament conveys.

An anniversary is a time for remembering, for reconsidering what happened at some significant point in the past, and for realizing again what that event means to us. Tonight, then, we will carefully and reverently think about what happened in the Upper Room on that first Holy Thursday and about what still happens among us today whenever we celebrate the Supper of our Lord. We will try to discover again exactly what Christ has put into this supper and what we can get out of it. Furthermore, we will study ourselves in our reaction to this sacrament. We will try to become more faithful and more grateful guests at His holy table.

The Lord's Supper

I. *The Guests*

Let's begin by looking at ourselves. What kind of guests have we been?

A. *Some of us do not partake often enough.* On an average Sunday only half the worshipers at a Communion service—perhaps even less—actually come to the altar to share in the Sacrament. Records show that some members let many weeks

or even many months elapse between their visits to the altar. Why?

1. *One reason is fear.* We should have the highest respect for the Lord's Supper, but some go far beyond this. They approach the altar as if it were the judgment seat of God. They feel that one false move or false attitude will condemn them eternally. Consequently, they restrict themselves to very infrequent participation.

2. *Another reason is self-righteousness.* This type of person simply doesn't feel the need for the Sacrament. He feels that he has behaved himself so well that it really is not necessary to partake frequently.

3. *Still other reasons:* Some do not wish to take the trouble to prepare properly. Others have adopted a quota—once a month or every other month.

B. *Others of us may be partaking in the wrong way.* Frequent participation in itself does not necessarily make you a good communicant. You may be partaking with the wrong attitude and expectation.

1. *Your participation may be very casual and mechanical.* Although you receive at every opportunity, it may be little more than a routine. You may no longer be aware of the mystery, blessing, and joy of the Sacrament.

2. *Or you may be impenitent.* You may want to escape the dirt and the danger of your sin, without really trying to break away from it. In this case, the Lord's Supper becomes sort of a safety measure to protect you from the consequences of sins which you enjoy and intend to continue.

II. *The Supper*

To become better communicants we must realize what the Lord's Supper actually is and what it can do for us.

It is the Lord's Supper. The text tells us that *He* took the bread and the cup and gave it to His disciples. Still today He is

the Host whenever the Sacrament is celebrated. The minister who officiates at the altar is simply His servant and representative. Christ is also the *feast*. What He gives us in this supper is nothing less than His true body and blood along with the bread and wine. "This is My body . . . This is My blood," He tells us in the text.

Knowing this should make a difference both in the frequency and in the manner of our attendance.

1. Our Lord's invitation is compelling. Since He is the Host, since He is the One who invites you to this supper, how can you refuse to come?

2. *There is no reason to fear this Sacrament.* The One who invites you is the One who loved you and died for you. He is also your Judge, but if you accept the atonement which He accomplished, you have nothing to fear. All charges against you have been dropped—the Sacrament itself assures you of that. He is not trying to trap you. He is trying to help you. It is possible to receive the Lord's Supper to your judgment, but if you are worried about this, it may be a good sign that it will not happen.

3. *His presence lifts the Sacrament above the ordinary and commonplace.* If we realize that He is present in person, with all of His power and holiness and majesty, going to communion will never be a dull routine, no matter how frequently we attend.

4. *The terrible price of the supper produces penitence.* This supper was arranged for us at great personal trouble and expense to our Lord. Would He have done this, if we did not really need it? He was punished and killed for our sins; His holy blood was poured out for our forgiveness. How can we take our sins lightly when we see what they did to Him? How can we abuse His forgiveness when we see what it cost Him?

Conclusion: One name for this day is Maundy Thursday. This name comes from

the Latin word *mandatum*, which means command, probably referring to the commandment of Christ, "Do this in remembrance of Me." And so, your Lord not only invites you to this supper and encourages you with His promises but even makes the matter more urgent by means of a command. He says: "Do this." Tonight again you have reflected on the great value of the Lord's Supper and you have heard this command. Will you obey it with new earnestness? Will you become a more devout and eager communicant because of your worship on this day?

GOOD FRIDAY

GAL. 2:20

Goal and Problem: To lead the hearer to a renewed grasp of faith in the crucified One and His victory over sin for us.

Introduction: Crucifixion was a method of executing criminals of the most despicable and hopeless kind—the runaway slave, the political traitor, the incorrigible robber. The cross was a form of legal, capital punishment, like the electric chair or gas chamber today. However, there was a big difference. Modern means of execution are relatively painless. Crucifixion was designed to accomplish death in as slow and as agonizing a manner as possible. The victims of the cross were supposed to suffer horribly because they had broken the law.

Jesus, of course, was an exception. His worst enemies, after years of investigation and a whole night of arguing could not find the slightest flaw in His record. He was the only truly good man who ever lived, and more. He possessed the very goodness and innocence of God.

And yet crucifixion was a very fitting way for Him to die. For in His death He was answering to a Law—not merely a law devised by faulty human justice—but the eternal and infallible Law of God. A stern

and shattering sentence had been passed, and it was carried out on Him. He was executed because of a long and ghastly list of crimes. In fact, the crimes were so serious that crucifixion was not itself a thing that could atone for them. Supplementing and even surpassing the bodily torture that He went through was the spiritual agony of being forsaken by His heavenly Father.

The crimes that crucified Him were mine and yours and those of all the world. When I stand at the foot of the Cross I am, in a very real sense, a witness to my own execution. He took our place there under the wrath of God. He was acting as our Substitute when the nails were driven through His living flesh, when He was hated and hurt and humiliated. Look long and hard at His wretchedness — it's what you and I deserve. He was crucified for us because we break the Law.

Crucified with Christ

I. *We are condemned by God's Law*

A. God's Law demands perfection.

What is this Law that punishes offenders so harshly? What does it expect of us, anyway? Well, it's the Law of God and it demands perfection. In the Ten Commandments and throughout the Bible God explains very clearly how we are to think and feel and talk and act. No area of life is too personal or insignificant to elude Him. He demands that our total person be turned over to Him. This is not too much for Him to expect. After all He is our Maker and Provider. Furthermore, He commands only what is good and right for us. The keeping of His Law does not make us miserable but leads us into happiness. He knows far better than we what is good for us. When we disobey we have not only gone against Him but we have harmed ourselves. He demands perfect obedience and the slightest break ruins us completely (Gal. 3:10). The Law

is not just a set of rules — it is a boundary; it is the battle line between good and evil. If the line is broken in any place, the forces of evil come rushing in to occupy and to destroy us.

B. Because we cannot meet this demand we are condemned.

I cannot meet this demand and neither can you. The truth is that the line was broken long before we were ever born. The forces of evil flooded into our human race back at the dawn of creation when Adam and Eve first violated the will of God. Along with every other child of Adam I was sinful at birth. The battle line for me was broken at the start and since then has been rebroken again and again. The damage is so great that I can not repair it on my own. I can not drive the forces of evil out of my life and consequently am unable to keep the Law of God. In this condition I am useless to God and even worse: I have not only been conquered by the enemy; I have collaborated with him. I am a criminal of the worst kind, and the Law of God has sentenced me to eternal isolation from God and from everything good. It has decreed that I must be confined forever in the hopeless emptiness and anguish of hell.

II. *Crucified and Risen with Christ*

A. Crucified with Christ.

However, because of Good Friday a great change has taken place. "I have been crucified with Christ," St. Paul says in our text, and by faith we can echo these words. Certainly, I deserve condemnation and eternal death, but in Christ this has already taken place. "One died for all," St. Paul says in another place, "therefore all have died." Because His crucifixion was in our place, because of who He was, of how He lived, and of what He endured — the accumulated, concentrated punishment of all human sin — we need never be condemned. God does not punish the same crime twice. I have been

crucified with Christ. That means that all my wrongs have been made right and that all my sins have been forgiven. It means that God can look upon me with favor, that He can treat me as if I had never done anything wrong.

B. My sinful nature has been put to death.

"It is no longer I who live," the text continues. This tremendous fact also results from the crucifixion. If I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer live. Something about me has died with Christ. In fact, my entire weak, corrupt, and sinful self has been put to death. Perhaps a clearer way to put it would be to say that this part of me is as good as dead. The power of sin within me has been fatally wounded and weakened by the death of Christ. I have the guarantee that sooner or later it will be completely dead and gone. In the meantime it still gives me trouble, but each time I face the Cross, the power of sin is killed a little bit more and made less influential in my life. My sinful nature is doomed and dying.

C. Christ lives in me.

Who lives in me, then, if I have been crucified? Who runs the life and body of Milton Rudnick, if he has been put to death? "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." As the sinner inside me grows weak and dies, Christ rises up in his place. The Christ who once died for me now lives for me—more than that, He lives in me. I live by faith in Him. That is to say, His will begins to seize control of my life. He begins to dominate my personality and to shape my decisions. The change is by no means complete. As said before, the old sinful self can still rise up powerfully within me and cause great trouble. However, Christ is living and fight-

ing there, too, and that means that someday I will win this bitter struggle with myself.

Conclusion: This is Good Friday and today we see Him die. As He dies, we die with Him. But that is not all. He will rise again not only from the tomb, but also to live in our hearts.

EASTER

JOHN 11:23-26

Goal and Problem: To instill in the hearer a firmer trust in the risen Savior for deliverance from every dimension of death.

Introduction: Jesus Christ turned death upside down. In our text He talks about a dead person as if he were alive. Elsewhere He talks about living people as if they were dead.

But these words by which Jesus turned death upside down are not an empty claim. They rest upon what He actually did. On that first Easter morning He, personally, in His own body upset the massive reality of death. On the day of His crucifixion death settled down upon Him heavily and completely. In the fullest sense of the term, the Son of God had died. But then, on the third day, the miracle happened. Suddenly, violently, death was overthrown. Life returned to the corpse that lay there so still and cold in the tomb. Christ demonstrated beyond all doubt that He is the Resurrection and the Life.

The miracle of resurrection did not end on Easter Sunday. This was really only the beginning. If His had been the first and only resurrection, it would not be of much help to us. There would be no Easter celebration. The event commemorated on this day would be little more than an historical curiosity. But His was the first of a long line of resurrection miracles. It was the beginning of a great chain reaction, one in which we Christians have been included. Ever since that first Easter, resurrection and life have

continued to occur in the hearts and souls of believing people. And we know that all this is leading up to something even bigger. On the Last Day we will be raised from the dead, just as He was, and we will join Him in eternal joy and victory.

Resurrection and Life

I. *We are the victims of death*

A. Physical death.

Resurrection is important because we are all by nature the victims of death. The road of life is different for each person, but it always ends in the same place and that is at the cemetery. We appreciate Easter when we think of ourselves as in the cemetery, in a coffin, or being lowered into the earth. This will actually happen. We know that. When we are young, happy, and healthy, death seems far away, almost unreal. However, it may be closer than we think, perhaps just around the next turn. Even if it is still in the distant future it will come with surprising speed. Each year time flies faster than it did the year before.

B. Spiritual death.

But this is just one dimension of death. Long before they carry us to the cemetery, in fact, from the moment of birth, we are in the grip of death, spiritual death. This death is separation from God. What air is to our lungs, what blood is to our veins, God Himself is to our soul. But we enter this life estranged from God and cut off from the life-giving power of His Spirit. To many this death is not so obvious or frightening as the death of the body, but it is even more serious and harmful. In fact it is the cause of physical death and eventually produces:

C. Eternal death.

The third dimension of death is known as eternal death. Unless something interrupts the chain of events, we pass from spiritual death to physical death to eternal

death. Eternal death is not extinction. It does not mean that we are completely gone and beyond all feeling and experience. It only means that we are gone from this world into an existence so horrible and hopeless that it is beyond imagination.

II. *Escape from death through faith in Jesus Christ*

A. Christ has entered and overcome death.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life," Jesus assures us in our text. "I upset this entire dreadful picture that death presents. I *am* the Resurrection and the Life. I not only talk about resurrection and life; I not only give them to people; I am the Resurrection and the Life. I personally overcome every dimension of death. I will walk into death, not like a victim walking into a trap, but like a conqueror invading enemy territory. I will die and I will rise again and My resurrection will be the end of death for all who believe in Me. For I will die in the place of all sinners. When I rise again it will be your guarantee that My mission has been accomplished and that the victory is yours."

B. To share in His victory we must believe.

Resurrection and life come to those who believe, the Savior tells us here. The benefits of Easter are lost to the doubter and the skeptic. We must believe that He has risen from the dead, and that we have resurrection and life through Him. This faith is not just a mental adjustment or an intellectual conclusion drawn from theories. Rather it is personal confidence in the living Lord. It is putting your life and your hope in His hands. It is looking squarely at every dimension of death and then seeing complete escape through Jesus Christ.

C. Easter creates faith.

Easter demands faith, but Christ does not leave it up to us to develop the faith that

we need. He Himself creates it in our hearts. He does so through the Gospel message of this day. As we hear the exciting story once again, His Holy Spirit is increasing our faith and confidence. We come to church on Easter and on other Sundays, not just to express our faith, but to have it built and strengthened.

III. *The transformation of death*

Through the eyes of faith, then, let's look once again at the three dimensions of death. If you believe that Christ is the Resurrection and the Life, the picture is transformed into something bright and beautiful.

A. Physical death.

Physical death becomes a minor incident, a swift transition to a new and better life. "He who believes in Me, though he die yet shall he live." Sure, they are going to carry me out to the cemetery some day. But to a Christian the cemetery is not a human junk pile where we are taken after death to disintegrate into nothingness. Rather it is a garden plot where our bodies are planted like seeds in the earth to rise again, new and beautiful and strong — never to die again. This is hard for us to imagine because we have never seen it. We are like amateur gardeners who can not believe that those little dried-up seeds will ever grow into anything like the pictures in the catalog. But they do, and so will our bodies. I do not dread death, the death of my body, because

I know that on the Last Day it will rise up glorious and immortal, like the body of Jesus on that first Easter morning.

B. Spiritual death.

Spiritual death, too, has been marvelously transformed. In fact something has already happened to change that. At Baptism God enters our hearts and restores spiritual life there. The miracle of Easter in this sense has already taken place within us. Sin is driven back and the presence of the Holy Spirit has taken its place. St. Paul puts it this way, "We were buried therefore with Him [Christ] by Baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4)

C. Eternal death.

All that's left of death, then, is eternal death, and in our text Christ dismisses it with one powerful statement, "Whoever lives and believes in Me will never die." Not eternal death in hell but eternal life in heaven is what we can look forward to, through faith in Him.

Conclusion: Death is not somebody else's problem. It's yours and mine, in every dimension. Physical death is inevitable. Spiritual death is an enemy that even a Christian must fight. Eternal death is the ultimate threat. There is only one solution — faith in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life.