

**“INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATION”**  
**JULY 5, 2020 SUNDAY SERVICE & SERMON**  
**(abbreviated COVID 19 service/50% seating capacity)**  
**Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church**

**HYMN #630 “America, the Beautiful”**

O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain;  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee,  
And crown thy good with brotherhood,  
From sea to shining sea.

O beautiful for heroes proved  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved,  
And mercy more than life!  
America! America!  
May God thy gold refine,  
Till all success be nobleness,  
And ev’ry gain divine.

O beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam,  
Undimmed by human tears!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee,  
And crown thy good with brotherhood,  
From sea to shining sea.

**PRAYER**

**CHILDREN’S MESSAGE**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**SCRIPTURE LESSON: *Zechariah 9:9-12***

***9 Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!***

***Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!***

***See, your king comes to you,***

***righteous and having salvation,***

***gentle and riding on a donkey,***

***on a colt, the foal of a donkey.***

***10 I will take away the chariots from Ephraim***

***and the war-horses from Jerusalem,***

*and the battle bow will be broken.  
He will proclaim peace to the nations.  
His rule will extend from sea to sea  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.  
11 As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,  
I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.  
12 Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope;  
even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.*

**CONFESSION OF FAITH:** I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

**SERMON TITLE: “STRENGTH FOR TODAY AND BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW”  
Zechariah 9:9-12; Matthew 11:25-30**

**CHOICE:** Can you look back at your life and see times when God prompted you to make a wise choice and you willfully made a poor choice against His will? Can you remember times God gave you an escape route from temptation and you ignored it and walked right into the destructive path of sin? I sure can.

**FAITHFUL:** God is so good. His Word is so clear. His day by day watch care over our lives is so faithful. His track record of goodness and mercy is perfect. Yet time and again we reject the Lordship of Christ and choose the path of sin...the end result is that we hurt ourselves and others as well.

**DRIFTING:** Our nation is not faultless by any means. But for the past 244 years, a good number of Americans have chosen to follow Christ and have God and His Word be a part of the fabric of our nation. But we have been following the lead of Europe in choosing secularism and false religious beliefs with the end result that trouble is brewing as our foundation stones are removed one by one. My son was saying to me recently that the “religion” of his generation is science. This is nothing new. The Psalmist saw the same thing happening in Israel and asks a question in *Psalm 11:3* “***When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?***” That is a question that many of us are asking.

**FUTURE:** Sometimes I wonder what the future of America is. It seems that we are quickly being transformed into something that won’t look at all like the nation we grew up in. A whole generation of younger people are buying the arguments of the socialists that have made places like China, Russia, Cuba, North Korea and Viet Nam terrible places of extreme dictatorship, persecution of Christians, unmentionable police brutality and the murder of millions of innocent people who don’t comply.

**REVIVAL:** There is always a chance that our culture will find a way back to the Lord. The invitation is open. It starts with you and me and then spreads to others. One preacher said that the best way to get a revival is to draw a large circle on the ground. Step into that circle and then pray, “Lord please revive everyone in this circle.” Someone who is walking close to God is infectious and soon those around them are touched by the Spirit that is flowing out of them like a river.

HOPE: Our Scripture texts today give us two invitations to return to the Lord. If we do, *we will find a new strength for today and a bright hope for tomorrow.* We cannot control what anyone else does but we can respond ourselves and that will make a big difference in the life of so many others.

## I. INVITATION #1: PALM SUNDAY

*Zechariah 9:12 Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.*

WEEPING: Zechariah 9 is the Old Testament prophecy of the Palm Sunday entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, He stopped and wept as He looked over the city. Listen to the deep-hearted desire of Jesus to save Jerusalem from the coming destruction. *Matthew 23:37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."* This is God's heart for America. He longs to save us from our poor choices if only we are willing.

In this Zechariah 9 text, verse 12 jumped off the page at me for the first time. God's Word here is so inviting:

1. INVITATION: Return to your fortress...come home
2. AFFIRMATION: Prisoners of hope...God's desire is to restore
3. PROCLAMATION: I will restore twice as much to you...God doesn't hold a grudge...He ABUNDANTLY pardons and reinstates.

All we have to do is come...but will we?

## II. INVITATION #2: SERMON ON THE MOUNT

*Matthew 11:25-30 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. 27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

1. HUMBLE ARE INVITED: the wise and learned won't come...only the "little children"
2. HE IS ABLE: All things have been committed to me by my Father... "His love has no limit, His grace has no measure, His power has no boundary known unto men."
3. REST IS PROMISED: Come...weary and burdened...I will give you rest. What a perfect invitation to stressed out people.
4. HIS YOKE IS EASY: We have to let go of the controls to find it. That is where people resist. Even if we mess up our lives, we still tend to want to keep control. But the peace and power are in the surrendered life.

ASLAN'S LAND: In the last book of Lewis's Narnia series, "The Last Battle" a group of folks called dwarfs are thrown out of this world into the beautiful, heavenly land of eternity. But they are blind to all the stunning scenery, excellent food and peaceful rest all around them because they can't trust anyone. They assume the

worst and that is what they get because they want to be in control and thus everything is viewed through their own skewed hearts.

**NEGATIVE:** How many of us are that way? We see the problems, we see the lack of provision, we focus on the burnt crust rather than the excellent dish that lies underneath that crust. We recently ate a hot dish that got a but burned on the top. While the cook was fussing about the burned top, I was enjoying the extremely delicious food that was under that crisp surface. At best, we are half empty or at worse, we see everything with negative eyes. Jesus calls us to come and find forgiveness and rest. But we have to let go and trust the one who went to the cross for us. He is trustworthy. Won't you take that step today?

**AMERICA:** America's only hope for each of us to take that step back into trusting God and His Word. We can return to our peaceful place with the Lord even right now, if we just take that one step of humble repentance of sin and trusting faith in Christ.

**STEP:** When we put together our church "Ambassador Hymnal," I was the chairman of the project. There was a popular demand among the elderly Norwegians for a more literal translation of a certain Norwegian hymn that had a nice poetic translation in the Concordia Hymnal, but missed some of the punch of the original words. I had a Norwegian speaking couple in my little country church do a literal translation and it speaks to this call to take that step of faith that will open the door to a whole new life. Let me read a few words: *"Just on step, just on step, you who doubtfully stand, Where you know you will not be led home. It will show you the way, it will open up years, Filled with peace as it leads you along. Just one step over the border, the world, unto God. Have you faith, have you courage to take it way through, One step from the world unto God?"*

**COME:** The Lord is offering us fresh "***STRENGTH FOR TODAY AND BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW.***" Beloved, every journey back home begins with that step in the right direction. Jesus is calling America to take that step back into His care and keeping. That step is taken one soul at a time. Come to Him today if He is calling you. You will never regret it. Our nation needs us to take that step today. Amen

**LORD'S PRAYER:** *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

**BENEDICTION:** The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace. Amen

**DOXOLOGY:** "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above, ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen"