

July 5, 2026 – Zechariah 9:9-12

Things aren't how they're supposed to be. That much is obvious. I don't mean things in this church specifically. I mean things in general. In our society. In our nation. In our world. There's selfishness, tragedy, heartbreak, pain, evil, and injustice all over. Crime. War. Earthquakes. Corruption.

Yesterday, we celebrated the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding. A wonderful, milestone for our country. And yet, when was the last time you said something about our nation or its values or its government that wasn't a criticism? I'm not saying it doesn't happen. I'm sure it does. But it still feels a bit odd to be celebrating a country that we spend so much time complaining about.

But, as I said, that's because things aren't the way they're supposed to be. We see that. We wouldn't try so hard to change things if we weren't convinced that they could be better.

That's true for each of us personally. Repentance is the recognition that things aren't the way they're supposed to be inside of me as well. Inside my heart. That my thoughts, words, and deeds can be better. That they must be better.

And that's something that even St Paul had to acknowledge about himself. *"For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."* There's not a night we can put our head on the pillow saying, "Thank you, God, for enabling me to be perfect today."

Every day, sin afflicts us. Every day we fail even those we love. Every day, others fail us too. We're a mess. Our society is a mess. Our nation is a mess. Our world is a mess. We need God to take over.

It's kind of ironic, actually. Our nation was founded on the premise that we didn't want a king. We didn't need a king. We were better off democratically governing ourselves. And while that's generally true when it comes to civil government, when it comes to spiritual matters, matters of sin and righteousness and heaven and hell, democracy and self government just doesn't work. We need a king to make things right.

And that's exactly what God promised through the prophet Zechariah: *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he."*

"Your king is coming to you." Israel tried to find their own king, once. They picked King Saul, a man who fit the worldly template of a king perfectly. But a man who was spiritually far from God. A man who was disobedient and arrogant and selfish.

No, the king we need is not the king we would pick. We need the king God provides. We need the king that only God can give. But that means this King is unlike any king the world has ever known.

Kings usually come riding war horses. They arrive with soldiers, banners, and weapons. They demand tribute. They conquer by force. They are just like King Saul: disobedient and arrogant and selfish.

But not this King. *"Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey."* It's almost laughably unimpressive. A donkey is not an animal fit for conquest. It's a beast of burden. A working animal. You don't ride a donkey if your goal is to intimidate your enemies. It's like showing up in a minivan.

But that was the point. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He was announcing exactly what kind of King He had come to be. The crowds expected a political Messiah. They wanted someone to overthrow Rome. They wanted someone who would restore Israel's national glory. They wanted someone who would make all of their earthly problems disappear.

Jesus had come to do something much greater. Rome was not humanity's greatest enemy. Sin was. Death was. Satan was. Those are the enemies our King came to defeat.

And He didn't defeat them by drawing a sword. He defeated them by allowing nails and spear to pierce Him. He conquered by dying. He won by losing. He was crowned with glory by being crowned with thorns.

That's why Zechariah can say this King comes *"having salvation."* He doesn't merely talk about salvation. He brings it with Him. He carries it into Jerusalem in his own flesh and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins. He carries it to the cross. He carries it out of the empty tomb.

Then Zechariah continues with another remarkable promise. *"I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations."* Christ's kingdom isn't built on human weapons.

Because His chief instrument is not the sword but His Word. *"He shall speak peace."* That's how Jesus conquered sin, death, and the devil back then. And that's how Jesus still reigns today. His kingdom doesn't advance because Christians seize governments or embrace violence.

It advances because Christ speaks. He speaks forgiveness to guilty consciences. He speaks life to the spiritually dead. He speaks His Gospel into hearts like yours and mine.

And when He speaks, peace follows. Not merely peace between neighbors or nations, though we certainly pray for that. A far deeper peace. Peace between sinners and God. As St. Paul says, *"Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* That's the peace we truly need.

The world tells us that peace comes from having enough money, enough security, enough political victories, enough personal success. Yet even people who possess all those things still lie awake at night.

Only Christ can quiet a troubled conscience. Only Christ can silence the accusation of the Law. Only Christ can say, *"Your sins are forgiven."* Only Christ can promise, *"Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live."* Only Christ can lift the burden of the Law, of our sin, of the mess our lives have become and say, *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*

"As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit." That waterless pit was an image every Israelite would have understood. It was a cistern. A deep hole in the ground where there was no water, no escape, and often no hope.

It's an image of Joseph, thrown into a pit by his own brothers. An image of Jeremiah, thrown into a cistern because the people refused to hear his message. An image that David uses in the Psalms time and time again to depict hell itself. That's where sin leaves us. Trapped. Unable to climb out. Unable to rescue ourselves.

And what sets the prisoners free? *"The blood of my covenant."* Those words should sound familiar. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus sat at the table with his disciples and said, *"This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."*

Zechariah was looking ahead more than five hundred years to the very blood Christ would pour out on Calvary. The same blood He still gives you in His Holy Supper as the guarantee that your sins are forgiven. Because of that blood, the prison doors stand open. Because of that blood, death has lost its claim. Because of that blood, Satan's accusations no longer have any power over you. Because of that blood, you belong to the King forever.

And so Zechariah concludes, *"Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope."* Usually prisoners are trapped by despair. But Christ has made us prisoners of hope. Hope not because the world suddenly looks better or because our nation suddenly becomes perfect or because our own hearts suddenly become sinless. We remain painfully aware that things are not the way they're supposed to be.

But we also know that our King has come. He has conquered the enemies that mattered most. He continues to reign.

And He has promised that one day He will come again, not on a donkey this time, but in glory, to finish what He began. Then every injustice will be judged. Every tear will be wiped away. Every grave will be emptied. Every effect of sin will be undone. On that day, things finally will be the way they're supposed to be.

Until then, we rejoice, just as Zechariah told us to do. Not because life is easy. Not because our country is perfect. Not because we have fixed ourselves. But because our King has come to us, righteous and having salvation. And because He has come to us, we know that He will come again for us. Amen.