

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA

April 22, 2012

2 Corinthians 2:14-16

This is a TRIUMPH Parade!

**Hymns: 149 - "See What A Morning" - 141
Closing: 168**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

The Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade...Not even close! The ticker-tape celebration for the World Champions...I don't think so! The Presidential Inauguration march...It doesn't even compare! The Triumph, as it was called by the ancient Romans, really has no good modern comparison. This event that was held for the conquering heroes of the Empire was a tremendous spectacle. It was extravagant in its pomp and size. It was detailed in how it was carried out. The procession was long and distinguished. First, the state officials and senate would march through the streets. Then came the trumpeters. Next, the spoils of foreign and distant lands were carried on display. People came out to see things from around the world that they may have only heard about. Then, there were musicians playing their songs, priests swinging censers which burned sweet smelling incense, and the white bull which was sacrificed to the Roman gods. Finally, after that long procession of fanfare came the general himself. He was followed by his family and his soldiers, all who shouted their cry of triumph. The pomp was outdone only by the significance of these proud days. This day of victory parade was rare even in the world of the Roman Empire. Soldiers, even generals, didn't often make it home from war, and a conquering general knew that this wasn't even a once-in-a-lifetime event. For those reasons, the Roman triumph was a can't miss event to see for all of the people of Rome. However, if you had a chance to be a part of this parade...there was tremendous pride involved.

Though a Roman Triumph hasn't been held since the early AD years, Paul tells us of a Triumph that

has happened more recently! In fact, it is going on today right before us. And we aren't just witnesses of this triumph parade, we get to participate. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul likens the aftermath of Christ's victory on Easter to that of a Roman triumph. After dying on the cross for the sins of the world and paying the price that God demanded, Christ rose from the dead to mark his victory. And it was victory that deserved to be celebrated. Christ's victory procession is certainly filled with pomp and glory. The once humble King is spared no glory after the time of the resurrection. Like the Triumph's once held in Rome, this victory parade for Christ is truly an incomparable event filled with joy and happiness.

Yet, the Triumph is not joyous for everyone who has a part in it. There were participants of the ancient Roman Triumph who found no joy in what was happening. They were the enemy kings, generals, and leaders who were captured alive. They marched through the streets of Rome in the victory procession just like the rest of the Triumph. However, there was no honor and celebration ahead for them. These defeated men were marching to death; they were to be the final show of victory. The sights, sounds and smells of the Triumph that signaled joy for many, meant something very different to these soon-to-be executed captives. Everything had different meaning for them.

Likewise, there are participants of the Triumph of Christ who also find no joy in this great victory march. And though it might seem somewhat foolish, I have to ask, "Is that some of us?" Now, what would lead me to wonder about our role in this victory parade? I'll just go to Easter Day. In the midst of much joy on this most glorious day of the Christian church year, I have to admit that I was a bit discouraged by some of what I saw and heard in God's house. On a day when so many celebrate the culmination of Christ's saving work done for sinners, I was a bit deflated by some of what I felt from God's people. On that most joyous Day of days, I saw some who acted like it was a huge inconvenience to be a part of the victory celebration. I saw some who were more intent on getting a few minutes of rest than listening to the proclamation of victory. I heard many "Alleluias," but didn't always feel joy behind those "Alleluias." As I asked one visitor about the service, they commented on the lack of energy and their struggle

to sing the songs because they couldn't hear anyone else singing. To me, that is shameful! And it certainly leads me to take an introspective look at my joy and the way I proclaim it; and I hope it leads you to do the same.

And while those observations cause me to look at myself, they most clearly tell me again about the devil and his powerful work. Even on Easter Day and in these days immediately following Easter, the devil works hard to convince that there isn't any joy for us. He does that by taking the cares of our everyday lives and having them overshadow what Christ has accomplished for us. He uses the struggles that are commonplace in our lives to raise up doubts and dampen joy. The problems of this life make us tired and weary, and sometimes it is just too difficult to find real joy even in this Easter Triumph. The devil works hard to have us quickly forget the Easter joy that many of us did have.

As you live each day of your life, don't let the devil deceive you. While there are those who can find no joy in the Triumph of Easter, it is never a single one of us who are in Christ. As hard as he might work in your lives to kill the joy, it is the Devil himself who is the conquered captive in this victory parade. He and his helpers are the ones who are doomed to destruction. They are ones who have no joy; and so they try to kill your joy. But, Paul tells us in Colossians 2:15 that it was the Devil and his powers that were disarmed by what happened on the cross. Never forget that they are the ones marching to destruction in this Triumph.

As for us, our part is full of joy! Paul tells us that we are always being led in the triumphal procession of Christ. We don't just celebrate the victory one day a year. Every single day of our lives is a step on the victory parade. Every single day, the victory banner of Christ goes before us. Every day, our conquering general leads us victoriously. We are not captives, held by the fear of upcoming death. We are part of the victory celebration, looking forward to the joys of life.

And our role in this victory celebration is not just to observe. We have the honor of holding an important part. Paul says we are the priests who carry the pleasant scents of victory. During those Roman Triumphs, the priests carried censers of burning incense. Wherever they went with that smell, people were reminded of victory. So it is with us. As we go through this life, we have the privilege

of carrying Christ's victory with us. The joy with which we can live our lives, even as they are filled with struggles, speaks powerfully to those who are around us. The ways in which we handle every adversity; the reactions which we have to every tragedy; they preach the victory that we know. And as we live in that victorious Easter joy, opportunities to speak what Christ has done also open before us.

When we live our joy, when we speak our joy, we wave those censers of victory. The aroma goes up to God, filling him with pride as his people live in the victory joy that he has provided. No matter how our witness might be received, he is pleased when his victory is preached through speech and action. For God, the news of victory and those who proclaim it are always a pleasant aroma.

As we go forward each day with Christ's victory assured, we march with him in triumph. For those who have been freed from sin, death, and the devil, that march is filled with joy. As you march each day of your lives, go forward in the joy that Christ's victory alone can give; and wave that joyful victory scent all around you. This life is a triumph parade which you are on. It's okay to show your joy! Amen.