

Sermon

“Regime Change”

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, March 28, 2021

Palm Sunday

Prayer for Illumination:

We gather in gratitude for your steadfast love which endures, Lord. Help us this day to receive your Word.

† **A word which lasts,**

† **a word which speaks to us, yet again, about your invitation to follow you in paths of fruitfulness and righteousness.**

As our ancestors of old received you and shouted “Hosannah,” so may we turn to you for every good blessing on this Sunday of Palms. We pray this in the name of the one who arrived in peace to announce the coming of the kingdom of peace, our Lord - Jesus the Christ, Amen.

*Psa. 118:1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!*

*Psa. 118:2 Let Israel say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”*

*3 Let the house of Aaron say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”*

*4 Let those who fear the LORD say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”*

*Psa. 118:5 Out of my distress I called on the LORD;
the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.*

*6 With the LORD on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?*

7 *The LORD is on my side to help me;
 I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.*
8 *It is better to take refuge in the LORD
 than to put confidence in mortals.*
9 *It is better to take refuge in the LORD
 than to put confidence in princes.*

*Psa. 118:10 All nations surrounded me;
 in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
11 *They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;
 in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
12 *They surrounded me like bees;
 they blazed like a fire of thorns;
 in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
13 *I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
 but the LORD helped me.*
14 *The LORD is my strength and my might;
 he has become my salvation.*

*Psa. 118:15 There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the
righteous:*
 *“The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;
16 the right hand of the LORD is exalted;
 the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.”*
17 *I shall not die, but I shall live,
 and recount the deeds of the LORD.*
18 *The LORD has punished me severely,
 but he did not give me over to death.*

*Psa. 118:19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,
 that I may enter through them
 and give thanks to the LORD.*

*Psa. 118:20 This is the gate of the LORD;
 the righteous shall enter through it.*

*Psa. 118:21 I thank you that you have answered me
 and have become my salvation.*

22 *The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.*
23 *This is the LORD'S doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.*
24 *This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*
25 *Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!
O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!*

*Psa. 118:26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.
We bless you from the house of the LORD.*

27 *The LORD is God,
and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.*

*Psa. 118:28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God, I will extol you.*

*Psa. 118:29 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

*Mark 11:1 When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and
Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples 2 and said to
them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you
will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. 3
If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord
needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" 4 They went away and
found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, 5
some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?"
6 They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. 7
Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on
it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy
branches that they had cut in the fields. 9 Then those who went ahead and
those who followed were shouting,
"Hosanna!*

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

10 *Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*

Mark 11:11 Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

- I. Here we are at Palm Sunday**
 - A. For six weeks journeying through Lent on our way to Jerusalem.**
 - B. Just a few years ago Sarah and I went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land...**
 - 1. We followed the path of Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem**
 - a. His birthplace in Bethlehem**
 - b. His childhood home in Nazareth**
 - c. The area of his miracles (Tabga, Beatitudes)**
 - d. Caesarea Philippi where Peter declared, "You are the Christ!" And Jesus announced his journey to Jerusalem.**
 - e. Then to Bethany, and to Mt. of Olives And Triumphal entry . . .**
 - d. Even stood at the (now walled up) gate through which he would have ridden on his donkey.**
 - C. That pilgrimage has helped me ever since to make the journey of Lent.**
 - 1. It would be a blessing if in the years to come we might make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land**

available here at CPC.

D. I hope that we have all “kept a holy Lent,” through prayer, devotion, fasting, and worship.

II. The season of Lent is so long (6 weeks) precisely because what we are celebrating on Easter is nothing less than a total reorientation of life.

A. When Jesus and his disciples arrive in Jerusalem and make his entry the powers that be — both political and religious — were right to be concerned.

1. From our perspective as followers of Jesus it is easy to find fault with those whose reaction to his arrival culminated in a horrific death-sentence — but to be fair, his coming to Jerusalem was, in fact, a declaration of regime change.

B. Jesus, of course, is declaring a “regime change” which is decidedly different from what the powers anticipated.

1. They fear a peasant revolt, or worse, a conquering army... but this new “king” arrives in an unanticipated way...

III. We are meant to notice that this is like a king’s coronation day.

A. All the synoptic gospels cast this moment in the format of Zechariah 9 where the King rides in on a donkey.

B. Why a donkey and not a horse?

1. The horse was a vehicle of war — the Abrams-tank of its day.
 2. The donkey was an animal of peace — more like a tractor or a Prius than a tank.
- C. To ride in on a horse is what conquering kings do.
 - D. To ride in on a donkey is to signal that you come in peace with the intention of peaceful prosperity.
 - E. But, as the story of the events of Holy Week illustrates only too well — there are powerful impulses which want to reject Jesus and all he represents and he is not easily accepted as the new king.
- IV. Now — it is easy to find fault with the religious and political leaders who reject Jesus . . . but pointing to their faults is not particularly useful or helpful for us.
- A. The significant question for us on Palm Sunday is, “Do *we* recognize how his triumphal entry today represents a regime-change *in us!*?”
 - B. Can we see that the one who we celebrate today is the one who demands that *we* reject our own autonomy and self-centered lives and accept his invitation to citizenship in a new kingdom in which we are happily and joyfully *dependent on God*?
 - C. I think that is why in the long tradition of the Christian church, Psalm 118 is assigned to Palm Sunday — it tells the story of *both* communal and personal salvation and of the radical reorientation which follows from such amazing grace.

V. The international lectionary committee omits verses 3-18.

- A. While I am a lectionary-preacher, I find these omissions which they make to be problematic.**
- B. The verses they would exclude are the verses which tell the nitty-gritty situations of rescue upon which the whole essence of regime-change turn.**
- C. Some years ago I had a dear friend who was waging a significant fight for life against the cancer which was trying to take him . . . he read this psalm to me and as he read it I heard the words of the Psalmist in a wholly new and more powerful light.**

4 *Let those who fear the LORD say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”*

*Psa. 118:5 Out of my distress I called on the LORD;
the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.*

6 *With the LORD on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?*

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I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.*

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*Psa. 118:15 There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the
righteous:*

16 *“The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;
the right hand of the LORD is exalted;
the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.”*

17 *I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the LORD.*

18 *The LORD has punished me severely,
but he did not give me over to death.*

VI. “I shall not die, but I shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord...”

A. To say that is to say that you have accepted the life which God is offering — a life of glad dependence and of joyful service.

B. But we should not underestimate how difficult it is for us to consistently say, “yes” to God’s offer.

*Psa. 118:19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.*

C. In biblical-faith to be “righteous” is to be happily dependent upon God for everything worth having. That is why entering through the “gates of righteousness” is to enter into a life of constant thanksgiving to God.

1. In those verses we heard a moment ago the whole point of the various troubles is that they described someone at their wits-end — and the edge of their capacity to cope. They were in a trouble from which they could not extricate

themselves . . . but God delivered and *therefore* they sing this song of glad thanksgiving.

D. I wonder if you are like me? If you admire self-sufficiency

- 1. if you aspire to the American myth of being self-made and**
- 2. having the mettle to “pull yourself up by your boot-straps.”**

VII. The phrase on the lips of the those who build a pathway of cloaks and palm-branches is,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

A. The first word is “Hosannah!” or *Save me!*

B. This moment of triumphant entry is steeped in the acknowledgement that *we do not save ourselves* we,

- 1. like the Psalmist and**
 - 2. like Jesus’ followers on that first Palm Sunday**
- Are glad recipients of God’s amazing redemption.**

VIII. So let this Holy Week be a time in which you and I consider earnestly the coming of the Lord to take over as the source of salvation in our lives.

A. I was sorting through some old files yesterday

- 1. 1999 “Keep God ever before my eyes”**

**I borrowed that goal from the advice of St. Anthony
St. Anthony**

Someone asked Abba Anthony, ‘What

must one do in order to please God?’ The old man replied, ‘Pay attention to what I tell you: whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes; whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the holy Scriptures; in whatever place you live, do not easily leave it. Keep these three precepts and you will be saved.’

B. It may be that accepting the Lordship of Jesus will require more than these three precepts . . . but I am a believer in setting modest goals and seeing how far they can take me.

- 1. Keep God ever before my eyes**
- 2. Live according to the wisdom of scripture**
- 3. In whatever place I find myself - do not easily leave it.**