

Thy Will Be Done...in Praise

Shepherd's Grace Church

April 13, 2014 (Palm Sunday)

When they had come near [Jerusalem](#) and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go into the [village](#) ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a [colt](#) with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." ⁴This took place to fulfill what had been [spoken](#) through the [prophet](#), saying, ⁵"Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, [humble](#), and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut [branches](#) from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The [crowds](#) that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, [asking](#), "Who is this?" ¹¹The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from [Nazareth](#) in Galilee." (Matt. 21: 1-11) (Also Read Psalm 118)

Last week at the Seder Supper we learned that nothing of what happened in this last week of Jesus' life was by accident. Every event was carefully orchestrated by God and was revealed to us as humans more than 2500 years before it took place! This orchestration by God illustrates the essential need for our understanding of all that is taking place. Imagine if you will, a conversation taking place before the beginning of time. God says, "In our image and likeness let us create them." Jesus says, "Let's think this one all the way through. If we create them in our image and likeness they are going to have the same freedom we have to choose love or hate, good or evil, right or wrong." God says, "You're right! You know what...some will probably choose wrong." Jesus says, "Duh!...Ya' think!!" They ponder their conundrum for what seems like an eternity...wait, it is an eternity! Finally, God says, "I guess we'd better have a back up plan!"

More thought and then the plan began to crystallize. God said, "If they choose sin, I will forgive them." Jesus said, "How will you do that? You can't even be in the presence of sin. There is no way You can offer reconciliation!" God says, "Hmmm...I think you're gonna like this one! See, when the time is right we will have you become a person. Now, you're gonna have to give up your Divinity and it's gonna hurt but you become a person. You teach them how to live. You live a sinless life and then, I will trade you for all of them!" Jesus says, "Why does it have to hurt?" God replies, "Look, they're not gonna like you much. When you live with them, they are gonna treat you badly. They are gonna use their interpretation of the rules against you and they are gonna reject you!" Jesus asks, "Where are they gonna get the rules?"

"I'm gonna pick one and use his family. When the time is right, I will give them the rules but because they will want power, some will use the rules against others in an attempt to prove they are more like Me than others are," God said. "These rules will be common sense rules but they will not use good judgment in interpreting them." Then God said, "When you come, they will see your wisdom and they will reject you as a threat to their power."

Then Jesus said, "I'm not much of a fan of being hurt, but I love the idea of being part of this whole creation thing! How are you gonna get them to pay attention to the rules?" God said, "That's the easy part. I'm gonna tell 'em over dinner!" "You're gonna what," Jesus asked? "I'm gonna tell 'em over a meal. I'm tellin' ya, there's no better way to get their attention than through their stomachs.! We'll have this meal with four cups of wine, I'll tell them that each cup is special. The first one will set them apart as special, the second will remind them that I chose them, the third will be your cup; the cup of redemption. They will get that right after the full meal and the fourth will be a cup of praise where they will give thanks for life!" They'll eat the same meal every year at the same time and they will remember right up till you come!"

"Part of the meal will be a lamb that they will have to learn to like first and then they will sacrifice it for supper. The purpose of the meal will come from their past; when they are in danger I will rescue them by having them spread the blood of the lamb on their door posts and telling them I will pass over them if they do it," God says! Jesus says, "That's it! That's what we can call the meal! We'll call it Passover! It will become a tradition and it will help them remember!" "There's just one problem," God says. "and this is where it gets a bit sticky for you!" "When you go down, it will be your blood...it will be you who is sacrificed ...it will be you who is offered in exchange for their freedom!" It will be you!

It is a fascinating conversation isn't it? Real or imagined, somehow, God came up with the plan to redeem God's people. God knew they would sin. God knew they would turn away! God knew that they would be disobedient and that only an obedient and sinless servant, one who loved creation as much as God could turn the world around and redeem the unredeemable! God knew when God said, "It will be you!" So God set about planning an instruction to God's people so that when the time was right they would expect God's future, God's redemption through Messiah and they would remember the instruction. They would drink their four cups. They would be set apart, they would be chosen, they would be redeemed so they could drink the fourth cup, the cup of praise.

The fourth cup was consumed at the end of the meal. It was drunk as people went out. It was drunk as people left the supper singing the hymns of worship and praise. These hymns were Psalms 113 to 118 and some others. In each of them there is the phrase, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" Psalm 118 however goes beyond that. "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His steadfast love endures forever!" The whole attitude of the Psalm is one of thanksgiving; thanksgiving in difficulty and in triumph...thanksgiving! The fourth cup is consumed in this attitude! The people go out acknowledging God's love for them and worshiping Him for their redemption! For almost two thousand years they assume that redemption was from the slavery they experienced in Egypt.

Psalm 118 however has a verse that moves the chosen people beyond Egypt and into a total freedom that can only be accomplished by the grace of God! "The Stone the builders rejected has become the corner stone!" (Ps. 118.22) In Matt. 16, Jesus asks the disciples, "Who am I?" Some say he is a prophet, others say John the Baptist but Peter answers, you are the Messiah! You are the Son of God! Jesus blessed his answer and said, "On this rock, I will build my church!" (Matt. 16: 18) Jesus was not talking about building the church on Peter, a faithful disciple, for He knew that all humans are subject to shortcoming and sin. Instead, Jesus is talking about building on the profession of faith, the words written now in stone, that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, the Messiah! To fulfill the words of the psalmist, however, this statement and the One about whom the statement was made would be rejected by those in power! The statement though was not rejected by His followers! Jesus, the Rock sent for the world to stand upon was acknowledged and was worthy of praise!

The psalm from the Seder sets the stage this day for the events that are to define the history of the world! That may sound overly dramatic but as Jesus rides down this morning from the Mount of Olives, He enters through the beautiful gate to thanksgiving and praise! His followers are worshiping and saying, "this is a day the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad!" As we are hearing these words we should be wondering what else might have been discussed before the beginning of time that would be brought to fullness in this day! The answer of course! Everything!

They come near Jerusalem and reach Bethpage at the Mount of Olives. Zechariah 14: 4 tells us this is the place where the world will be judged and salvation will be pronounced. That Jesus comes to this place, to this moment is not by accident. In the beginning, when the plan for eternity was being unfolded, God authored a location such as this one so that it might be revealed by the prophets and remembered by the faithful. From this place, a place determined even before the beginning of time, God's salvation, God's redemption was to enter the wickedness of the world!

From here, Jesus sends two disciples ahead of him. He gives them explicit instructions about what they will find and what they are to do. In this activity, Jesus is reminding us of two things. First, notice that Jesus sends two. Here at Shepherd's Grace we have only two rules for effective ministry. First, we do no harm. If we are in doubt about others being harmed in any way, we attempt to wait, to watch, to wonder at how God will reveal the fullness of events so that we can accomplish His work with no harm being done to other people. I cannot take credit for this rule. It is one given by John Wesley to people in the practice of ministry and it has served us well here.

The second rule we have is that we never do ministry alone! We always work together. Sometimes it is in groups of two or three, sometimes it is in groups much larger. Next weekend we will have the opportunity to come together in a larger group. In the past, "Scripture Hill" has been restored by one or maybe two people and as a result, the people have not been able to keep up. They have felt put upon to the point where they are no longer willing and able to do what is necessary. Churches and people who try to take on too much often experience this. Those who work together, however experience exhilaration at all they are able to accomplish. This year, the youth of our church will gather with people of many different faiths and the next generation will make the journey of faith in our community, will work to restore the Word of the Lord, the Rock which others have rejected but which has become our

cornerstone! Work done together can be a tremendous witness to those who do not yet know all God desires to give us!

Jesus teaches this rule as he sends two. They go together so they can encourage one another and so they can help one another with the work that is to be done. They go together because they have been given exact instructions and they can help each other to make sure the work is done exactly! They go together in anticipation of the time when they will have to go together to accomplish the mission Jesus will send them on after His resurrection.

They know they are being prepared and they pay careful attention so they can learn to pay even more careful attention when Jesus says, "go then and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!" They go together so they can witness together. God anticipates opportunities for witness. When Jesus tells them of the questions that will be asked of them, he gives them the response. "Just tell them the Master has need." When disciples witness using the Master's words, amazing things can happen and when they have the opportunity to share together, results are not forced but words and actions are freed to make an impression on those who do not yet believe! When the word we share is the word of God, it does not return without accomplishing its purpose!

The disciples go as they are instructed not just to learn but to complete. They go to fulfill. In the beginning, when the plan was being conceived to redeem creation, God brought all of creation to use! God could have used any animal but chooses to use a donkey, and the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9: 9 paints the picture for the people. The king comes riding humbly on both. When the people in the crowds see Jesus riding on two animals, they cannot help but connect Him to the promised one of Israel! They see Him coming in peace and humility as a servant king and not as an oppressor. It is important to the events that are about to unfold that the people know this. It is important to the whole of God's plan that it unfold exactly as it is told about 400 years earlier. Those who follow Jesus down from the Mount of Olives must know who He is!

The disciples, for their part, complete their work exactly as Jesus has instructed it. The rest of the response is up to the crowd. The crowd knows the tradition of the Seder. There is an empty chair left at the table. It is for Elijah the prophet. Part of God's instruction to them in the tradition of the meal is to leave a chair and to open the door so Elijah can enter and announce the reign of God! The action of the crowd affirms what the disciples said about the crowds back in chapter 16. Some say you are Elijah, others say John the Baptist! The crowds know Jesus' importance, they just have not recognized the fullness of who he is!

When the crowd sees Him sitting on the donkeys, they understand what Jesus is telling them. He is not Elijah, He is not a prophet. He is Messiah, the promised one sent into the world to complete God's plan for God's Kingdom to come! They spread their cloaks as for the king of old and they cut branches of the trees to lay before Him as He rides down the hill to the city. The branches recognize his royalty and affirm the crowd's knowledge of him. They think of Him in the same way as they think of Simon who

liberated the temple from Antiochus 4 Epiphanies! They go ahead of Him and they follow in anticipation of God's liberating power once again freeing them from oppressive and tyrannical rule!

The disciples have done exactly as they were instructed. They have fulfilled the prophecy. The crowds have done exactly as they were taught. They knew the scripture, the tradition of the Seder, and they acted as they were supposed to act. This event, this acknowledgment so carefully orchestrated from the beginning of time was now unfolding in exactly the way God intended it to unfold.

The variable, the unknown was the world! Those who choose other than God, other than scripture; those who chose to seize power for themselves were about to oppose the actions of one announced as the "Son of David," and the "one who comes in the name of the Lord!" According to Josephus, the official keeper of the Roman history there were two entrances to Jerusalem that day! While Jesus and His disciples were making their way down the hill from the Mount of Olives, Herod was entering Jerusalem from the other side, from the eastern gate. He did not come humbly on donkeys. He came on chariots and going ahead of him were soldiers riding horses or war. Following were drummers beating the cadence and all who were involved were demonstrating the power of the Roman empire!

The arrival of Herod puts the city in turmoil! They now have two Roman rulers in their city; Pilate the prefect of Rome and Herod who comes to observe Passover. The city is full of people trying to get ahead, trying to claim some of the power, trying to promote and increase their own worth to the world. Meanwhile, Jesus rides down the hill toward the "Beautiful Gate" the gate through which the Messiah will enter the city at the time of salvation. He rides not on chariots with war horses ahead and drummers behind. He rides instead on a donkeys, almost in parody of the procession taking place on the other side of the city! His procession is almost laughable in contrast to the procession of the world, the power of the world which will be brought to bear fully on Him later that week!

Jesus for his part rides slowly, excruciatingly toward his inevitable destination. As he rides down the hill he looks to his left. There he sees the garden at Gethsemane! As he rides by, he remembers a conversation that has taken place outside of time. God says, "this is going to hurt!" Jesus knows that the pain will not just be that of death but also of betrayal! He knows that some of those who walk with him will turn against him. He knows they will greet him in the garden with the betrayal of a kiss and that in their embrace they will unknowingly fulfill the plan put in place "in the beginning."

When I was in Israel in 2006, one of the life changing events of my time was the realization of just how close the geography of the Land was to the scripture word of God. This is not a coincidence. God's plan is not for us to suspect who Jesus is. God's plan is for us to know and as I walked down that path Jesus might have taken into the city, as my feet touched the stones that might have been in place when He passed that way I realized that some of the large crowd would have spilled over into the garden! Some of the crowd would have been standing among the olive trees where Jesus and Judas would stand just a few days into the future!

The amazing part of Jesus' journey down the hill is that Jesus knows! He knows the garden and he rides on. He knows the future and he rides on. After he rides a little farther, he can look to his right. There, not as close as the garden but not far away, he sees the hill at Calvary and he knows! He knows that he

will be led there, that he will be beaten there, that he will be brutalized there. He remembers again the conversation “outside of time” when God says, “this is going to hurt!” He will know the pain of betrayal, of alienation and abandonment and He will know the physical pain of torture, the kind of pain the world tries to use to secure victory. For the world, death and dying are the ultimate signs of defeat and Jesus rides on into the way of the world! He knows all that is ahead and he rides on!

As Jesus enters town, the city is already in turmoil. They have witnessed the power of the world on display in all its splendor. They have seen the king of the world exercise power and now they see the parody of that power! Far removed from the pomp and ceremony they witnessed just a short time before was the procession in front of them. A man riding on donkeys. Crowds waving branches. No war horses, no drumbeats, no chariots of fire! All the city saw was a crowd waving branches in front of and behind the laughable figure of a man riding two donkeys! “Who is this,” they asked? “What is this supposed to be?”

“It will be you!” Jesus remembered. The conversation that took place before the beginning of the world would come floating back to his mind. “You will be given in exchange for them. You will be handed over to the world so that those who are in this world but not of this world might be redeemed. You will be given over to sinful, hateful people who will not know you! Those who do know you will betray you and you will be arrested!” The fullness of the conversation would weigh heavily on Jesus this day as he rode triumphantly through the “beautiful gate,” the gate Messiah was said to have entered through.

The crowds at the top of the hill seemed to know, to believe, to understand the one who comes in the name of the Lord. The crowds at the bottom of the hill did not know him. The crowds Jesus enters into this day know the world! The crowds Jesus enters into this day know power! The crowds Jesus enters into this day know pain! The crowds Jesus enters into this day know persecution. These are the elements of Roman peace they have been taught to respect. Their indoctrination into such worldly ways has blinded them to what others have seen.

The crowds Jesus enters into this day have not seen the lame walk, the blind see, the poor restored to dignity. They have only seen pain and persecution and the peace of Rome. There are many in our world who only know this world. They have not yet heard of the prophet Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee. They only know bitterness and betrayal.

The crowds of our world, the crowds Jesus enters into today do not know of the conversation that took place before time began. They cannot imagine a situation where someone will give even his life so that not only believers but unbelievers as well can be redeemed. They do not know about the Seder supper and the instruction God gives in that meal more than 1500 years before Jesus walks into the world! They do not know God’s attention to detail and God’s desire that all might be redeemed!

They drive by our city and they see words on a hill. The words are overgrown by brush and the once white message is now tarnished and tattered. They cannot quite make out the fullness of the message because they do not know. They do not know that generations past put the message there for the generations of the future! They do not know that generations past believed so strongly in the message they were willing to work to maintain that message on a daily basis. What they do know as they drive

by next week is that the people of this generation are willing to offer themselves for a message that is as important today as it was when it was first written. "Christ died for the ungodly!" He knew as he rode by and he rode anyway. He knew when he first came and He came anyway! He knew and in the garden that night he prayed! "Let this cup pass me by!" then he prayed, Thy Will Be done! Amen