

Palm Sunday: The Power of Love

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...

If ever there was an empire on earth that had a *love of power* – it was the Romans... words like ‘decadent’ and ‘haughty’ – ‘wealthy’ and ‘gallant’ – ‘refined’ and ‘opulent’ - are common adjectives that describe their rule... their influence was expansive throughout the Ancient World - the emperor expected to be worshipped – the military was ruthless and well-armed – and wherever they set their sites *their love of power* allowed them to eventually dominate and take over...

Which is why Jews living in our Lord’s day despised the Romans and prayed to God for a savior to rescue them *from Roman oppression*... but who would this savior be?... and with what power of his own (would he bring) *to take down the giant*?...

Today, as you know, we celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entrance into the city of Jerusalem... where crowds of Jesus’ followers lined the streets with shouts of Hosanna (which means, ‘Save us!’)... “*save us from our enemies*”...

but pitted against the backdrop of Roman power and might – the question one might ask themselves is - was Jesus’ entrance really that triumphal?...

And I say that because instead of a white horse (or a stallion) Jesus arrived on the back of a donkey (a donkey that he had to borrow)... and he wasn’t wearing a fancy robe or a jeweled crown (but a simple tunic that was worn by average, everyday people)... and his entourage weren’t sophisticated body guards or military men (like the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate would have surrounded himself with) – but just some simple fisherman, a few tent makers, maybe a washed up tax collector or two, and other assorted rabble (yelling out at the top of their lungs) as they made their way through the winding streets of that city...

And what were they yelling?... They were yelling, “*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!*”

But the king of what?... Of the donkey-riders?... of the rif-raf?... of the outcasts?...

I mean, it’s no wonder that the Pharisees eventually tell Jesus to cut it out... because he was making a scene, (and it was obvious to everyone that he

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wasn't going to overthrow Rome) if that was indeed his intent... It was clear that he was powerless (and no match for Roman rule)...

In fact, if you know anything about a Roman procession, or a Roman parade, you would know that there was always a white horse, with trumpets and banners, and legions of military men... and compared to that - Jesus' donkey (and his motley crew) were obviously *out matched*... and if this was a challenge to the world order of his day - everyone who saw his entrance into the city of Jerusalem knew that Jesus wasn't going to win... Jesus couldn't win... and it would have been almost sad to watch, really... and you would have been a fool to put your bets on him (on the day that we now call Palm Sunday)...

But here we are today - with our own palm branches - hoping in the '*one who comes in the name of the Lord*' (who comes not with brass and trumpets - but with humility and meekness) and perhaps the only reason why we would cheer for him today is because *we know* how the story ends... that he will reject the **love of power** (and instead) he will use the **power of love** (to not only change the world - but the hearts of men and women - even unto this day)... the only true force that can overcome all evil in this world...

But do you know what I've discovered about having faith in God's rescue plan for the world (about having faith in Jesus Christ)?... I've discovered that even knowing how the story ends can still leave us wondering at times... leave us wondering if the whole thing is *too good to be true*... or if, like the people who threw those first palm branches, that we too are being foolish *believing in the power of love to save us*...

But then I remember something a Hebrew teacher that I had in seminary once said (that has always proved to me to be true - and gives me reason to come out and wave my own palm branches every Palm Sunday)... he said, "*Jesus appears weak when we believe that we are strong - and Jesus appears strong when we are weak*"...

And what he meant by that was - when you have your youth, and your health and wealth, and your power, your titles, and a sense of control in life - just like the Pharisees and the Roman Empire had on that first Palm Sunday - (this whole business about Jesus and the power of love might seem like nonsense)... because we live in a world that loves power... and if we were honest with ourselves (we do too)...

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But it's when you find your own self in a weakened state (whether it be through illness, or depression or addiction, or as you go through a divorce and you're feeling lonely and hopeless – and especially when we're struggling with grief and with loss) it's at those difficult times in our lives where the full beauty of our Lord's presence (**and power**) can be made known to us (where our eyes can be opened to see Jesus – not as a source of weakness – but as Lord and Savior) – it's the times in our lives when we realize that more money and more power and more titles are not going to take away the pain, or resolve the thirst within us, or even satisfy our deepest angst...

it's at those points in our lives (when we are weak – and we let Jesus rule our heart) that we can come to realize the full power of His love...

which is why Jesus didn't come to overthrow the Romans (or even our own enemies today) but to rid our hearts of the evil that plagues each one of us... and when our king touches a heart with his love (only then can one know freedom)...

"I have come to bring you life" Jesus says in John 10:10, "and to have it more abundantly" ... such is the power of love...

Let me close by telling you a story that was shared by a very well-known preacher named Fred Craddock... And I remember he once told a story about his father who was very suspicious of the church... Yet, Fred's mother loved the church and was very involved with it – but his father felt that the church was only looking for two things: more money and more people to fill the pews...

Fred Craddock tells of the many times when the pastor would call the house looking for his mother - and how his father would make sarcastic remarks about Jesus, and about the church, and about the church members... and he was always saying the same thing, *"The Church doesn't care about me or anyone else – all it wants is more money and more members"*... and Craddock says that was what his father always said – and he would repeat it over and over again...

And then Craddock writes the following... he says, *"And then one day he didn't say it... He was in the veteran's hospital, and he was down to 73 pounds... They'd taken out his throat, and he said, "It's too late." ... They put in a metal tube, and X-rays burned him to pieces...."*

I flew in to see him... He couldn't speak, couldn't eat... I looked around the room, potted plants and cut flowers on all the windowsills, a stack of cards twenty inches

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*deep **beside** his bed... And even that tray where they put food, if you can eat, on that was a flower... And all the flowers beside the bed, every card, every blossom, were from persons or groups from the church...*

He saw me read a card... He couldn't speak, and so he took a Kleenex box and wrote on the side of it a line from Shakespeare... If he had not written this line, I would not tell you this story... but he wrote: "In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell my story."

And so I said, "What's your story, Daddy?"

And he wrote, "I was wrong!"

I share that with you this morning because there have always been many things said about Jesus Christ... assumptions have been made about who he was, what he stood for, why he's come into this world, and what he can do – and perhaps there is a tendency – like many who saw Jesus on the day that he entered into Jerusalem – to believe that he's weak (or outmatched – or easily pinned under the cares of this world)...

But let not the world tell you about the Son of God – let him (on this day and evermore) speak to your own heart (and reveal to you what God can do) – (not with the love of power) but with the power of His love to see you through... which is the greatest power of all...

May the Grace of our Lord fill you with a blessed hope... May the ears of your heart be open to the whispers of His love... and May He watch over you (and over me) until the day of our passing (from this world) into the world to come!...

In Jesus' name we pray!....

Amen!