

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

Saturday, 14 April 2018

Hebrew Scripture Reading: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Christian Scripture Reading: Luke 19:28-40

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

“False Expectations Exceeded”



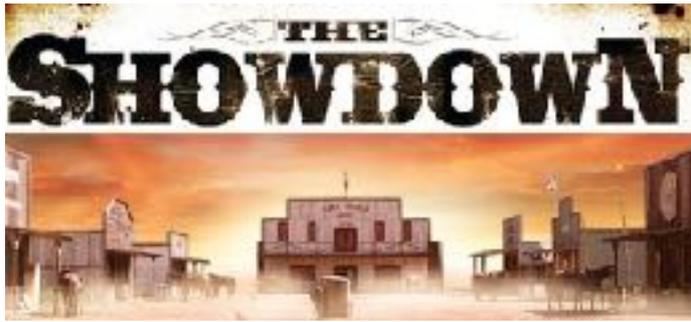
Watch Video before Reading Sermon

[What Is Palm Sunday Video | Sermon Video - Sharefaith](https://www.sharefaith.com/video/what-is-palm-sunday-video.html)

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This morning I would like us to take very seriously the advice from our video to “steel ourselves against the mistake Jesus’ people made the day that he made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Let us not be tempted to project our own agendas, our own wants, our own expectations, our own ambitions on God”. This morning let us look at this mistake that those who shouted “Hosanna” made.

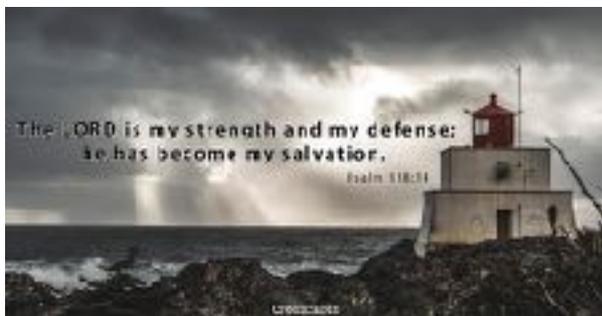
Let me set the scene.



What we have during the first Palm Sunday is a classic showdown. While there are many actors and factions, there were really two primary opponents: the oppressed Palestinian Jews and the Roman occupiers/colonizers. These two opponents came together in a pressure-cooker environment. Thousands of pilgrims descended on Jerusalem. All felt much tension and electricity beneath the surface. The antagonists waged a tactical, a strategic, tug of war. Who is going to lose their nerve first? Under extreme duress, who is going to strike first? Who is going to retaliate best? Will God intervene on the side of the oppressed? Or, will the foreign occupiers wipe the blood off their swords once again?



To learn from the mistake those who followed Jesus, we need to understand that Jesus, those who were for him, and those who were against him were all involved what is referred to as an ‘[arche]typological re-enactment’. In other words, a story that was very well known was subconsciously acted-out in order to obtain a desire outcome - because ‘that is the way it should be’ (circular, as opposed to linear, history). The Palestinian Jews knew things would soon come to a head, so they looked to the scriptures, which they knew by heart, backwards and forwards, to read the storyline. How should things happen so that God would intervene and impose God’s justice and will on the world?



Psalm 118 describes that which needed to be re-enacted: “Open for me the gates of righteousness, I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate through which righteousness may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have begun my salvation [...] O Lord, Save us; Oh Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord [...] *with boughs [palms] in hand*, join in

the festal procession [...]. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever”.

Did you hear that? The gates of Jerusalem. The Saviour is coming. Save us. We will win. With palms in hand. We will praise our ruler forever. Doesn't all that sound familiar?



What is truly amazing is that not only were the actors during the first Palm Sunday following the archetype described by the Psalmist, but the Psalmist also is following an older archetype.

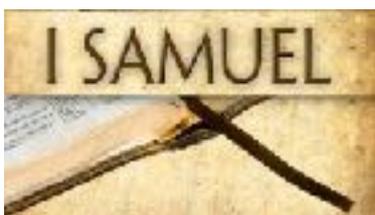


The Psalmist remembered ancient times when the Ark of the Covenant processed into Jerusalem. In times past, it was understood that God dwelled within the ark, the ark of God's presence. If the ark entered Jerusalem, all was safe. The book of Numbers states that when the ark

went out “the enemies fled”. After the victory, the ark “returned to the countless thousands of Israel” (Numbers 10:35-36).

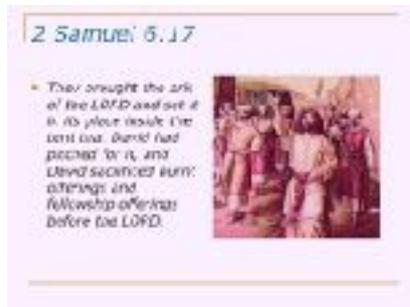


If it was not palms that were spread at Jesus’ feet, then cloaks were spread. In Joshua, when the Ark of the Covenant came into Jerusalem (but after a defeat), Joshua ‘tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground...the elders did the same...why do you deliver us into the hands of our enemies who destroy us’ (Joshua 7:6-7)? Here we just change Joshua to the Palestinian Jews and the Canaanites for the Romans.

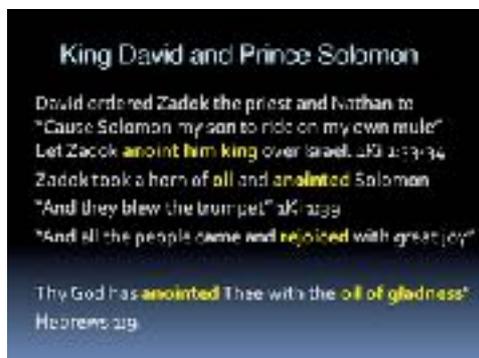


The same thing happened in I Samuel: ‘And when the Philistines learned that the Ark of the Lord had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid. A god has come into the camp, they said, ‘We’re in trouble! Woe to us! Deliver us from the hand of their mighty

god' (I Samuel 4:6-7)! See here, we just switch the Philistines for the Romans.



In II Samuel, the same thing happens. After defeating the Philistines, King David ‘brought the ark of the Lord and set it in its place inside the tent that he had pitched for it, and he sacrificed burnt offerings before the Lord” (II Samuel 6:17).



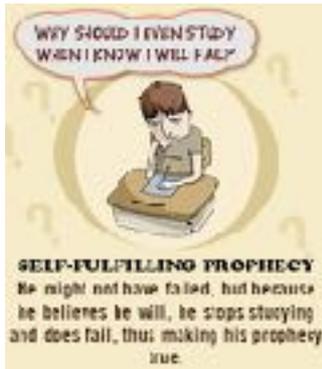
When King David made Solomon a king, he commanded, “Take your lord’s servant and set Solomon my son on my own mule and take him down to Gihon. Have the high priest anoint him King of Israel” (I Kings 1:33-34). And we know from our scriptures that the kings David and Solomon were political kings.



The prophet Zechariah proclaimed ‘Rejoice greatly, Oh daughter Zion, for your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey...he will proclaim peace to the nations” (Zechariah 9:9-10). But if we read on, it is clear that this rule is also political. Zechariah states that God’s rule will extend from sea to sea (Zechariah 9:10).



How many of you have ever heard of what is often termed as a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’? In short, our beliefs about ourselves influence our actions, our actions towards others impact others’ beliefs, others’ beliefs about us cause others’ actions towards us, which in turn reinforces our beliefs about ourselves.



Those of you who are professions in the field of education know the dynamic better than I. Often a child will say, “Why should I even study when I know that I will fail?”

These are all to do with the family.

How can people outside of the family influence your behaviour?

ENVIRONMENT YOU YET TO BE INFLUENCED BY.

If you look at a list of like minded people and you:

Eg. Family, Geo users, musicians, trendy, trendy.

Do you think that how other people see you can influence your behaviour? Eg. Being seen as a trouble maker.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1370080e3304>

Those of you who have studied psychology know about family systems, whereby the classic question of ‘nurture verses nature’ is debated as it concerns the behaviour characteristics of first, middle and last born children. To what extent are inherent personality traits conditioned by roles and to what extent do roles determine behaviour characteristics?

Self Fulfilling prophecy

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The dynamic of self-fulfilling prophecy can be viewed in the criminal justice field whereby if we are seen or expected to be criminal, then that is all that we can do.



Even Dr. Phil teaches us that same old thinking results in same old results. Hence, his frequent question, “So, how’s that working for ya?”



Abraham Lincoln once said, “You are what you think”.



What we observe happening during the first Palm Sunday is a ‘typological re-enactment’ where the presence of the Lord, Jesus,

entered into Jerusalem. And with Jesus entry, a great victory will take place. An enemy will be defeated. God's reign will prosper the people forever and ever. Everyone during that first Palm Sunday knew their parts, lines and roles. And, whether subconsciously or consciously, I don't know, they act out the play; they performed as the scriptures instructed them in order to obtain the desired outcome: freedom, justice, victory! Jesus, the Israelites, and even the Romans knew their role (as least their role in the sight of those who they occupy), and they all played their parts.



Remember our video clip warned us to not make the same mistake those who followed Jesus made on that first Palm Sunday. They understood that God took sides against one army or another. They understood that Jesus, the saviour of the world, favoured their race and not others. They understood the God would defeat one nation and allow their nation to dominate the world. In other words, their God was a tribal God who would defeat the Romans, subdue them and usher in a reign of righteousness and peace.



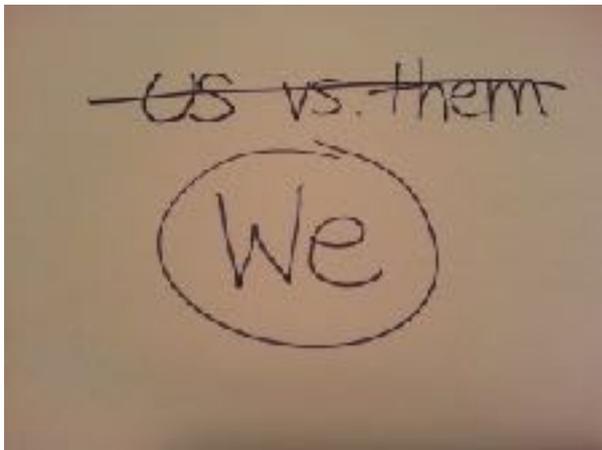
Today, we have political division in our country that is frightening. Admittedly, I too am on a side. I, like the early Israelites, desire justice, peace and the reign of God. Like so many in our nation, I want one side to win over another side. We have in our country Republican against Democrat, liberal against conservative, capitalist verses socialist, left verses right. Call it what you will. Both side believe they are in the right. And sadly we are playing our parts, being the foot soldiers of our side's ideology and we are following a typological re-enactment towards a new kind of civil war.



This Palm Sunday may we learn the lesson taught by Jesus, that God includes *all* nations, *all* people, oppressors and oppressed alike, in his salvific plan.



It would do us well to remember that Jesus resurrected the Roman soldier's servant/child/son (Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10). Remember, Jesus healed the ear severed by Peter from the high priest's servant (Malchus, in Matthew 26:1, Mark 14:47 and John 18:10-11)? Remember, Jesus told the criminal, 'today with me you shall be in paradise' (Luke 23:43)? Remember, he prayed to God, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34)?



You see, Jesus broke the 'us versus them' mentality and declared that all are part of God's covenant. We must stop and fighting for the other's demise. I am not suggesting that we on the right or the left

stop striving for that which we believe. I am not suggesting we abandon our principals. Advocating passionately for policies that benefit the commonwealth is all well and good. Robust political debate is beneficial and healthy. However, the ‘winner-take-all’, ‘us versus them’ dynamic must end. The insults, the denigrations, the ‘you are the enemy of the people’, the ‘we will take back our country’, the ‘you are a traitor’, the ‘this (though constitutional) is “illegal” oversight, the ‘you should be in political exile’ only causes us to fall into a typological re-enactment that will only lead us to some kind of civil war. A self-fulfilling prophesy that leads us unable to love those with whom we disagree will result in our mutual destruction.



The first-century Palestinian Jews held a false expectation that Jesus would be a political king who would defeat their enemy militarily. Jesus did not meet that expectation. Instead, Jesus *exceeded* that expectation. Jesus became a spiritual king who said ‘not

just *this* nation is included in my plan, but *all* nations are included in my plan'. Not just *some* people, but *all* people. Not just '*our*' side, but *their* side too, benefits from God's grace. Until we learn to see one other as if we are all God's children and until we learn that we are all called to be included in the salvation God offers, then we will continue to live and die by our false expectations, that Jesus far exceeded.

This was the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded: "Amen".