

April 9, 2017 (Palm/Passion Sunday)

Luke 19:29-47

Holy Vessels: "Holy, Holy, Holy"

The Rev. Lynn P. Lampman

Palm Sunday, as we know it was the day of a procession – the one in which Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Yet, this day was really the day of two processions! For in the year 30 AD, Roman historians record that the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, led a procession of Roman cavalry and centurions into the city of Jerusalem.

"Imagine the spectacle of that entry. From the western side of the city, the opposite side from which Jesus enters, Pontius Pilate leads Roman soldiers on horseback and on foot. Each soldier was clad in leather armor polished to a high gloss. On each centurion's head, hammered helmets gleamed in the bright sunlight. At their sides, sheathed in their scabbards, were swords crafted from the hardest steel; and, in their hands, each centurion carried a spear; or if he was an archer, a bow with a sling of arrows across his back.

Drummers beat out the cadence of march for this was no ordinary entry into Jerusalem. Pilate, as governor of the region, knew it was the standard practice for the governor to attend such religious celebrations as the Passover, and as further motivation, he knew this was a festival celebrating the liberation of the Jews from another empire, the empire of Egypt." And given the potential of uprisings during this time, he dare not be there without a presence that showed force. (Charles Warnock)

Juxtapositioned to Pilate and the Roman Empire's journey into

Jerusalem, is Jesus. Here he comes, riding on a donkey, the transportation of choice for one who came to bring peace. You can be sure Pilate was on a warhorse, yet not Jesus. Did the crowd notice? Did we?

They didn't because they were too busy shouting and taking part in the parade. It is important to note what the waving of the palm branches meant back then. Not like today, where we see it as a "cute" activity for the children. No, rather the symbolism is this – palms were used to celebrate the Maccabean victory less than two centuries before, when Jewish Maccabees militarily conquered and retook Jerusalem from pagan overlords. As you can see, they had some expectations when it came to Jesus, and that wasn't lost on Rome either.

And how about that scripture from Zechariah chapter 9 that Jesus quoted according to Matthew, upon entering the city, "O Daughters of Zion, behold your king who is riding on a donkey." They heard the king part, and then filled in the rest of the blanks themselves. Yet, when doing that, they failed to remember what they surely would have known, the rest of the scripture from Zechariah 9, where the prophet spoke to the people of Judah, known as Judea in the New Testament. Did I say, where Pilate was governor – oh yeah, Judea. Back to the rest of Zechariah 9 where God reassures they have not been forgotten, "But I will defend my house against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch. Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will

proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from River to the ends of the earth.

In other words, Jesus' quote from the prophet Zechariah was to remind them of the entire passage. The message they heard was, "God will deliver the nation from the oppressor" — in this case, Rome!

Yet, did they hear that this king they seek would come to them humbly, not on a steed of war, but on a slow-moving donkey, the symbol of a king who comes in peace.

There was an estimate that at Passover, Jerusalem went from a city of 50,000 to a city of 500,000 — half a million people. It is then no wonder that the existing authorities — both Jewish and Roman — were nervous. For here comes this guy riding into the city, making some sort of royal gesture, in the pomp and circumstance of the likes of King David and Solomon before him, and then goes into the religious center of the city, namely the temple making pronouncements and symbolic actions indicating the Temple is coming to its demise.

George McDonald, in a poem most utilized at Christmas time writes, "we were all searching for a king to slay our foes and lift us high, thou camest a little baby thing, to make a woman cry". "McDonald understood that Jesus, from womb to tomb, from birth to death, did not come to meet our expectations of what a King should be like— he came to meet our deepest needs— our need for salvation more than temporary political solutions, or instead of trying to exalt ourselves above other nations, our need to let God be King and Lord over our lives, not

ourselves”, not our government or our heads of state, nor even POTUS, not any other human being other than Jesus. (Ben Witherington)

Here’s another interesting irony in the Palm Sunday story. “The pilgrims coming to town with Jesus for Passover, were singing the so-called Hallel psalms, the ‘let’s go up to Zion’ songs, Hosannas which mean “God saves” and hallelujahs meaning God be praised. They were their ancient praise song. So, could it be that either they would have sung it anyway or maybe they did intend for those lyrics to be for him. Because they misunderstood their salvation coming from a rebellion or militaristic take over by a Messianic figure, than their salvation would come because of the life, teachings, and death of Jesus - on a cross, no less!

He came so we would not come to our own demise. He came to save us. They kind of had it right when they shouted, “Holy, Holy, Holy, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Yet, they said, “Holy, Holy, Holy “,to the wrong god, a false god, not to the one who is worthy of our full devotion and worship. Their golden calf, was made with their image, not designed by Jesus. The problem was they did not recognize who he really was (God means of salvation) or what he needed to do – to bring about their, ours and the world’s salvation. The truth was and is: *Jesus did not come to meet our expectations or the people of his day or anyone or any group in-between. He came to meet ours and their needs.*” He did not come to slay our foes and lift us high. He came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus bitterly disappointed both the hopeful crowd of pilgrims and his own disciples throughout Holy Week. And when you dash peoples’ highest hopes that severely, it is not a surprise that you end up on a cross by the end of the week. Today, when we hear

the loud Hosannas and Hallelujahs and sing with joy about the coming of our true King, the prince of peace, will we remember his words when he said— ‘if anyone would come after me, let them take up their cross and follow me’, all the way to Golgotha. For there and only there can our salvation be found. And it comes to us not via a sword in his hand, but with his arms stretched wide. Not with “kill them” on his lips, but rather, “forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” Not wipe them from the face of the earth, but rather, “Mother, behold your son, son behold your mother”; no, not to incite revolt, but to bring peace through a relational revolution. Salvation never comes from blood shed, unless it takes into account the One who shed his blood to redeem the world and us. Violence did not have the last word. He did. “It is finished,” and then he breathed his last. Salvation has come! Hallelujah, hallelujah!