

Barre Congregational Church
April 10, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser
~ Palm Sunday
“The Crowd praised God Joyfully in Loud Voices”
Our sermons and previous worship services can be found on our website at
www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: Luke 19 v 28 - 40

I. Introduction:

Many years ago, I worked with groups of Palestinians and Israelis, bringing them together to hear one another's stories and to see whether they could come together to work towards peace and mutual understanding. By the time they arrived in the US, they would have their first real encounter with one another as people who have been estranged by their conflict. I would welcome them and work with them for three weeks in a Camp situation, hearing their stories, teaching them listening skills to hear one another, taking them through very difficult conversations, and leading them to a place of peace, renewal and healing. It was not always easy to create conversations and safe spaces for them to share stories. One exercise I had one group do in 2005 was to think about two things they had in common amidst all the issues that divided them. They selected the issue of the land over which much fighting had occurred and the olive tree. They both loved the land and this special tree. I asked them to come together around a large table with an empty canvas, paint, and paint brushes, and to create a painting that illustrated their conflict and how to get through it. The finished product called "Freedom", describes (in their words) "the situation where two people, an Israeli and Palestinian, are walking away from the darkness of fear, violence, hopelessness, towards the sun representing hope and freedom. The sun casts its rays onto these two people, bringing light to them, leaving their shadows behind. The olive tree welcomes these individuals, its roots bursting the soil, indicating the strong ties that both groups have with the land". At the end of this project, they sat together with their heads very close together as they were writing their names around the painting in Hebrew and Arabic. What an awesome picture that was...what an amazing experience it was with them, people who came from the land Jesus had walked and ministered in, people so unhappy and wounded.

II. Jesus entering Jerusalem, City of much complexity...

In our passage Jesus is getting ready to go to Jerusalem. He had been staying with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary in Bethany the week before the Passover. This would be the time where He would have an inner struggle between life on earth and knowing that the end is near. With inner fortitude and with God's help He would prepare for this journey.

Jerusalem has a very complex history, as we know. It is central to the life of those living in the Holy land, a land still fraught with conflict. After its destruction during the Babylonian invasion in 586 BC, Jerusalem and the temple were later rebuilt in 538 B.C. when the Jews returned. It became a major urban center later. During the time of Jesus, the population of Jerusalem was about 80-120 thousand, and the temple had been visited by hundreds of thousands every year. Jesus apparently visited the temple complex daily during His final week in Jerusalem. We see Jesus weep over Jerusalem in verses 41 ff, and then He prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, because they did not acknowledge God with them in the person of Jesus Christ. Jerusalem was then destroyed again in the year 70 AD. Today the conflict in the Holy Land is continuing, and Jerusalem is still finding itself in the middle of this situation.

This is the City Jesus is entering when He requested that a specific colt be brought to Him, so He could ride on it as He entered the city. It appears that Lazarus and his family would have known the owner of the colt, for Jesus to make the request with such specific instructions. His entry is viewed by Eckhard Schnabel in his book, "Jesus in Jerusalem, The Last Days", as being staged as a royal-messianic event that fulfills the prophesy of the Zechariah 9 v 9-10 which reads:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses 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 the river to the ends of the earth.

Jesus would enter as Israel's King, not on a horse that symbolized war, but on a donkey that symbolized humility. He comes as a King of peace, not war. We see in the other gospels the crowd in jubilation, shouting Hosanna, and praised God joyfully in loud voices. In our passage the crowd refers to all of Jesus' followers. It was the day where "pilgrims who witnessed Jesus' approach to

Jerusalem spread their cloaks and branches on the road that led from the Mount of Olives via the Kidron Valley into the city, providing a festive cover on the unpaved, dusty valley road in honor of Jesus”, as beautifully described by Schnabel. What an important event it was for them. Their King had arrived! The Messiah is here! The One who created all those miracles is with us! “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”, they shouted! Their shouts are of peace and glory, the peace that Jesus came to model and to speak about. His life and ministry were of that, bringing some of that heavenly peace to earth, and they experienced it!

III. Conclusion

For us that is Palm Sunday, when we celebrate a day of historic significance, when we sing and worship God and wave our palms in recognition of the One who came to this earth to bring peace, to speak of peace and love and joy and healing.

That Jesus who wept over Jerusalem because they did not understand His message of peace and love, is weeping today over a world where there is war and destruction. Our Palm Sunday is set within a time of tragedy, of violence and war and pandemic and strife. Our Palm Sunday is looking for the kind of peace in heaven and glory in the highest that our passage is speaking about. Palm Sunday is looking for crowds and crowds of disciples who recognize the Christ King who led the way of peace. But our Palm Sunday is also about a King who would walk through the valley of death, coming from Mount Olives and enter Jerusalem, be arrested at Gethsemane and taken to be crucified. Then and now, the world has been exposed to the love of God Almighty through the coming of Jesus Christ, ushering a period of redeeming love. But the world is still searching for a little bit the heavenly peace, even if only a little to bring not just Palestinians and Israelis together, but Ukrainians and Russians, culture upon culture, the different peoples of the earth, black and white, and all of us in our different persuasions and belief systems, to break through the tragedy and crisis of Palm Sunday and Good Friday and experience the resurrection of Christ from death and destruction, hate and division, so that we all will run into the streets and the mountains and the valleys, in the airports and the trains, everywhere, “Peace on earth as it is in heaven”! When the Pharisees asked Jesus to rebuke His followers, He responded that even the stones would cry out if they were to be stopped. Let nothing stop us from putting ourselves out there ushering a period of peace on earth. Amen