

**Palisades Presbyterian Church**  
**Palm Sunday Service**

Readings: Isaiah 50: 4-9a; Luke 19:28-40  
Hymns: # 88: *All Glory, Laud, and Honor*  
#513 *Let Us Break Bread Together*  
# 89 *Hosanna, Loud Hosanna*

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*Hearts and Stones*  
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“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation; lowly, and riding on an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.” From Zechariah 9:9.

It was 333 before the Common Era. The Hebrews in the small town of Jerusalem were a short distance from the advancing armies of Alexander the Great, systematically taking apart the Persian Empire. In Alexander’s advance and the Persians defeat – the Hebrews, as they had so many times before, saw the hand of God.

In the Book of Zechariah, we find these words; words which Mark, Luke and others believed prophesied what took place in the week leading up to Passover some two millennia ago. Words, which, were most likely woven into witness of the hand of God once again at work, a witness that heralded the triumphant arrival of Jesus into the city.

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.”

As always, what actually unfolded is – unclear.

Some suggest that it was about this time that Jesus, having seen and been a part of all that had transpired in the few years of his public ministry, that Jesus had come to see himself as the Messiah, accepted it, accepted it, set his face to Jerusalem and allowed God’s plan to embrace him, permitting events to unfold in total submission to the will of God.

As a prophet, do you think he knew of this morning’s text in Isaiah, Second Isaiah? It continues the poem we started weeks ago, this time Isaiah talks about the life of the prophet. In full and elegant style, this author anthropomorphizes the call as an immersion of the prophet’s entire body: the tongue of the teacher, the ear that awakens each morning to God’s word, a back given to the world that would ridicule and beat the bearer of God’s message, a cheek from which the oppressors could pull hairs, and a face set firmly – despite insult and spitting.

“God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know I shall not be put to shame; the One who vindicates is near.”

Maybe Jesus did know he was the Messiah. Maybe he rode into town on a donkey, as he had before. Maybe the text was adapted to better reflect the earlier prophecy of Zechariah, affirming Jesus’ cosmic authority and commanding and receiving the animal through God and his intercession of others. Whether embellishment or actual, Jesus entered Jerusalem, that is for sure.

Perhaps he saw himself entering as the Messiah, or maybe Jesus just looked around and knew that he was at the crossroads of creation with the power of eternal creation, where heart and stones, alike, are one. And in him, in this moment, he saw the true and mystical nature of all things, to the degree that the heart and the rocks, the hands and the palms were no longer furcated segmented forks of creation, but whole, integral, and made of the stuff of God -- created in the glory of God – with God’s presence enveloped in and around it all, Jesus included – so that had the crowds been quieted – the stones simply would have taken up the chorus, shouting themselves! So full was the mystery in Jesus, so clear things had become.

Imagine the lucidity, and while I believe Jesus did not know what was to befall him in detail, I do believe he understood the risk of embracing and preaching from such an enlightened presence – his being now challenging the very structure of human idolatry. He knew – probably from the time of the beheading of John the Baptist – he knew that there were those who would go to any lengths to stop him and others who followed. He must have known, as well, come to the realization, that no matter – he would go forward. He could not become some quiet, faded, ex-itinerant preacher and prophet -- and be who he was. He had incarnated – become incarnated -- of the I Am. The decisions for what was to happen – were no longer his.

“God helps me; therefore I know that I have set my face like flint, and I know I shall not be put to shame. The One who vindicates me is near.”

What do you think? Do you think Jesus knew these words of Zechariah? I wonder if this was his prayer that he repeated like a mantra, quieting the ringing crowd in his ears to the presence of God in all his being. I wonder...from this place and this time, and I ask you to wonder, too.

On this Palm Sunday and beginning of Holy Week or Passion Week, I ask that we wonder aloud and consider how we are called into the fullness of God in one of the most difficult of ways: seeing all creation, events, and outcomes in relation to the greatness of God – even the advancing violence against this rabbi, prophet, believer, messiah – named Jesus.

Simply, we are asked, again, to find God in the harshest and hardest of places and rejoice, believing that God carries us through - in all ways beyond our abilities to ever know. We are asked, once more, to see Jesus as the one who has gone before us, in fulfillment of the prophets, to assure us that the cross, the symbol of oppression, violence, and death – has been transformed into the symbol of eternal justice – an eternal and accessible justice to even the lowliest among us. The cross has become a cosmic highway to our reunion with the Creator, even for those who ride into town on a donkey.

That is good news for all of us, I think – and, yes, I believe.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation; lowly, and riding on an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.”

Amen.