### “Command Peace” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Apr. 10, 2022

**Zechariah 9:9–10**

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. 10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem; and the battle-bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

**Luke 19:35–40**

35 They brought the colt to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” 39Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

At a time when the world needs a message of peace, we come upon the words and deeds of Jesus that relate to peace. Jesus carries out a prophetic action to deliberately act out Zechariah 9, which was the prophecy of a Peace King, a strangely non-violent king who will even cut off the chariot and the warhorse, and break the battle bow. This Peace King will command peace to the nations, and will have a world-wide dominion. It is a shocking prophecy, and the rabbis didn’t know what to do with it. It wasn’t what they expected the Messiah to be, not at all.

Yet it was a well-known passage, a stand-alone gem in the scriptural tradition. Jesus weaves it into his mission and message, to let people know that he will be a Peace King. He will not lead an uprising against the Romans, he will not “break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” as Psalm 2 had said (2:9).

There were such violent prophecies in the Bible, but Jesus did not identify with those. Rather, it is this remarkable peace passage in Zechariah 9 that he has made into a part of the gospel. It is no longer an odd stand-alone passage, but an essential principle in Jesus’ own teachings. He made the power of love and the strength of peace two of the building blocks of the gospel.

As he approached Jerusalem on this day, a few days before Passover, there was an excitement that spread through the crowd. Some of them were his followers; others were onlookers who had heard about this new prophet. Some had possibly heard him preach, or at least heard stories about him. They began to chant or possibly sing a line from Ps 118:26 “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord,” although in the New Testament, “one” is changed to “king.” The praise is excessive, in the minds of the Pharisees who are standing by, watching, and they tell Jesus to make his disciples stop (19:39). But Jesus says, if these weren’t doing it, the stones themselves would cry out. In other words, somebody or *something* has to celebrate his coming. It is too momentous an occasion to have no acclamation. Don’t we, too, feel this joy in our hearts as we recall this story?

For Palm Sunday really was a kind of enthronement of the Messiah, even though the occasion was soon betrayed by the authorities who carried out an ambush and arranged for an execution. Palm Sunday represented a moment of truth in a sea of falsehood, a glimpse of decency amidst a system of corruption, even a day of courage within a week of cowardice and violence from the establishment. These palm branches that we wave are a reminder of what adulation our Master was due.

Imagine if the Jewish leaders had been more hungry for truth, more open to Jesus’ teaching? Imagine if they *had* accepted him as a teacher, how that would have changed their understanding, and then what an interesting role they could have played in the spreading of Jesus’ message? Imagine if the leading edge of Christian evangelism had been the whole Jewish people? They could have transformed the world.

But the leaders then were more interested in holding onto their turf. And, unfortunately, some religious leaders, in all the institutional religions, are still largely attached to their religious turf. Hindus and Muslims fight over locales in which there have been both temples and mosques in times past. Different Christian sects still quibble over bits of floorspace and roofspace at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. I have been there and have seen the various groups’ feeling of entitlement over corners, stairways, and side doors.

As long as there is such an attachment to symbols, objects, and turf, there will not be religious peace. Such territorialism is often associated with unethical and dishonest approaches. Some rather ignorant Pharisees in Jesus’ day claimed that no prophet ever came from Galilee (John 7:52), although actually one to four biblical prophets did come from Galilee: definitely Jonah, and possibly Hosea, Nahum, and Elishah. Those Pharisees’ remarks seem to reflect an extreme nationalism, which could accept only prophets who were from Judah, and not Galilee.

Prejudice of various kinds blinded most of the Jewish leaders to the spiritual significance of Jesus. It took a certain spiritual aliveness or an honest spiritual hunger, to recognize Jesus. He spoke of these people when he said “these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance” (Luke 8:15). Some of those along the road into Jerusalem had such honest and good hearts, and became disciples. Others of those along the road were fickle or shallow, and had no deep appreciation of Jesus. “These have no root,” like seeds cast upon rock (Luke 8:13), as Jesus said in the Parable of the Sower.

But it is good to know that there *were* some people in Jerusalem who could see at least something of who Jesus was, and they proclaimed “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” (Luke 19:38). If these had not cried out with joy, the very stones on the road would have had to cry out, so to speak. And when humanity finally, *some* day, turns to Jesus, he will teach them peace. And then will the battle bow be broken, and he shall command peace to the nations. But this will only come when a great spiritual change has swept across the earth, and people really desire to be instructed in the ways of peace. When I speak of a spiritual change sweeping, I really mean a series of waves, carried on through time, an age of spiritual striving that will change how people relate to each other.

Humanity will have to learn to repudiate aggression, greed, and the desire for domination. There will be an age of spiritual breakthrough; it must be passed down through families for generations, and life will be transformed on this earth. Nations will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks (Isa 2:4). We are not near that now. But we can pledge our hearts to God *now*, and let peace *begin* with us. The reign of God is wherever people are at peace with God, with themselves, and with their neighbors. Remember, our actions *do* affect others; we can create good waves of effects.

There is a deep psychological link between having peace with God, peace with others, and peace with oneself. Violent dictators have a profound spiritual unrest and dis-ease that eats away at them, and they project this unease into outward aggression. Cooler heads must prevail. World peace cannot prevail without world law, and there must be governmental structures to enforce such law. Isaiah thought God would have to do it: “He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples,” he said (2:4), but I think we humans need to do it, with God’s love in our hearts. We need to create a place for God’s love-action in our hearts and show this love through our actions. Those who hear the word, and hold it fast in an honest and good heart, will be the pioneers of the way to world peace. Inspired by the Prince of Peace, we humans have to take steps to outlaw war on earth. Some day we will be able to cut off the chariot and break the battle bow. Some day he will command peace to the nations, but first we have to repudiate rapacious militarism and violent nationalism. We have to do our part to make ourselves teachable by God. We have to renounce the toxic behaviors and habits of the past.

We have to choose peace and fairness, and repudiate violence and exploitation. Jesus asked, “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” We need to help supply a “yes” answer to that question. Affirm your values. Reject what assaults those values. Help to make his will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.