



Pastor Gwen's Sermon Palm Sunday - April 5, 2020

Let the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. AMEN

Today is Palm Sunday. I am missing waving my palm, as I walk down the aisle at Christ the Servant singing "All Glory Laud and Honor". And I am missing you all as well. Today begins the most important week in the life of the Christian church: Jesus walking the road to his death in Jerusalem. Although He gets a warm welcome of Hosannas, the week will end in what appears to be a tragedy. But we all know that the death of Jesus on the cross is not the end, by any means. And so, in another week, we will celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus.

Today, as I am thinking about Jesus riding into Jerusalem, our federal government is trying to figure out how to help the American people over this COVID 19 pandemic. The right and the left cannot quite agree on the details of a stimulus plan to benefit everyone in the country. Some say it should be from the top down and some bottom up. Republican or Democrat, whatever your view, we all hope that our elected officials do have our best interest at heart. They just see a different way to go about helping the people they represent. By the time you hear this message, I expect that a huge stimulus package will be in place to get American going again.

Our sermon series of Cross Purposes from Creative Communications for the Parish written by Carol Geisler that follows fits quite nicely into what the world seems like to many people today.

Our government is a prime example of how people with different ideas sometimes come together to accomplish little, if anything. When there is a difference of opinion, there is little cooperation with each other. In a business or corporation, the leaders may have a certain goal in mind, but if the workers don't know or share that goal problems will result. The owners and employees will be pulling in opposite directions and the goal will not be reached. That is why many businesses today have mission statements, so everyone in the company knows the purpose and plan and everyone is working toward that one goal.

I think that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the people watching him on that first Palm Sunday had different goals in mind for Him. The cheering crowds waved palm branches like flags. They threw coats in the road to form a kind of red carpet if you will, for their hero. They hailed him as the Son of David who came in the name of the Lord. Although some people were not sure what they should believe about Him, to others Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. He was a prophet and a king who

gave them bread and healed their diseases and even raised the dead. Surely, they thought, this is the great Son of David who will defeat the hated Romans and restore Israel to its former glory as a nation. Even at Jesus' ascension, after his death and resurrection, his disciples still asked, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" The prophets said, "Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." And now He was there! The people had a purpose, a goal in mind, for Jesus, he would be their king.

Others watching the parade through the streets were not so happy with what they saw. They saw the king on a donkey as dangerous competition. Listening to the cheering crowds, the Pharisees complained to each other: "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the whole world has gone after him." Earlier the Pharisees, the chief priests and the ruling council gathered together to discuss their own purposes and plans for Jesus. They knew Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. They knew the rabbi from Nazareth was popular. If things continued in that direction, the Romans might see him as a threat, as someone who could start a rebellion. Roman armies would and could destroy the whole nation. Caiaphas the high priest, without being aware of his prophetic words, said that it would be better for one man to die for the people, than that the whole nation should perish. From that day the priests and rulers had a purpose, a goal in mind, for Jesus. He would die.

The crowds had one purpose for Jesus; the Pharisees and religious leaders had another purpose for him. Jesus, too, had a purpose, the purpose and plan of God the Father. The plans of the priests and Pharisees for Jesus' death were made soon after Jesus' raised Lazarus. But God's plan was established, Scripture tells us, "before the foundation of the world". (1 Peter 1:20)

Jesus made no secret of the purpose and plan God had for Him. He told his disciples, "that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day he raised." (Matthew 16:21) He told Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). Jesus rode faithfully into Jerusalem, obedient to his Father's purpose, "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross". (Philippians 2:8)

At the end of this Holy Week, these cross-purposes would come together exactly there, at the foot of the cross. Jesus' enemies saw Him die, nailed to a Roman cross, one man dying for all the people. The people who hailed him as the promised King saw the sign posted on his cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews". Yet these purposes were all subject to the greater single purpose of God.

Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the King on a cross, the Lamb sacrificed for the sins of the world. Peter would later proclaim to the crowds on Pentecost: "Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know, this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, losing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." There were many purposes for Jesus that day, but there was really only one purpose, the plan of God for our salvation, the plan that led to the cross.

What would your purpose have been for Jesus on that first Palm Sunday? It is interesting to speculate on that, but we know the whole story. A far more important question is this: What is God's purpose for you? Jesus answered that question; "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." On the cross and at the empty tomb, the purpose of God in Christ Jesus was fulfilled for you.

And so there you have it. The crowd on that first Palm Sunday had their own goals or plans for Jesus, as did the Pharisees. But no plan would or ever could stand up against the ultimate reason that God sent His only Son to walk among us; our salvation. So, as we continue to go through some tough times, I find it comforting to know that God is in control. His plan and His goal for our world are secure. We only need to have faith that He is the One through which all things will come to pass.
AMEN