***“A New Thing”*** by Stephen Finlan at The First Church, 4-14-19

**Isaiah 43:19–20, 25**

19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?. . . .

25 I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

**Luke 19:29–40**

29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say: ‘The Lord needs it.’”

32So they departed and found it as he had told them. 33As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35Then they brought it 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 . . . 38saying,

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”
39Some Pharisees said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Jesus came in a miracle-minded age. His apostles came to *expect* miracles from him, and would see miracles even in down-to-earth events. It may be that Jesus spoke to some friends in Jerusalem and told them he might need their donkey, but by the time the story reached the ears of Luke, the story had been talked up, and elevated into a miracle story.

I will come back to the question of miracle later. First, let’s join Jesus on the road, riding slowly into Jerusalem. Imagine him lurching along on the little donkey. Is this a great moment? Actually, yes; it is. It is great because of the astounding *teaching* message here. Now, a donkey is a poor man’s transportation. If Jesus were a king or a military leader, his transport would be a horse. Jesus is showing that he is not a military figure. Further, he is deliberately fulfilling a messianic prophecy from Zechariah. The prophecy reads “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. 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” (Zech 9:9–10).

You can see that it is a prophecy of a peace-bringing Messiah. The Messiah is not a warrior, not someone who will ride a horse, but someone who will ride on a donkey, even a *young* donkey, who will remove the weapons and chariots of war, and somehow “command peace to the nations.” *How* he will do this is not explained, but *that* he will bring peace is clear. The Messiah is a peace-maker. And *we* are to be peace-makers, too.

Now, Jesus identifies himself with the peace-Messiah prophesied here. He deliberately lines up a donkey so he can be seen to be acting out this prophecy. Look for a moment at our Isaiah reading. It says, “I am about to do a new thing” (Isa 43:19). Well, what Jesus does here is a new thing: a king riding on a donkey; a king bringing peace. How rare is this?

Well, there *IS* another prophecy that is a bit similar to this one. It is the one in Isaiah 9 that talks about military boots and garments being burned as fuel, and says “a child has been born to us . . . . authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:5–6). What amazing prophecies these were, both for the original hearers, and for us. It is particularly in the books of Isaiah and Zechariah that the Messiah is understood to have divine powers.

We know that when Jesus commenced his ministry, as recounted in Luke 4:18, he identified himself with the healer, the breaker of oppression, and the freer of captives from Isaiah 61. Now, near the end of his ministry, he identifies himself with the Peace Messiah, the chariot-remover, and the battle bow-breaker of Zechariah 9. This vision of the Messiah as peacemaker leaves a lot of questions in our minds. Does the Messiah first militarily defeat some opponents, and *then* make them put down their arms? Probably not, since that is not even hinted at. How does he do it, then? Have the nations themselves become exhausted by war and become ready for peace? That is not stated, either.

But we might have a hint in today’s reading from Isaiah 43. The purported narrator is God, who says that he “blots out your transgressions for my own sake” (Isa 43:25). Is *this* how world peace may come about, when people learn about God’s forgiveness? In other words, will peace become possible when enough people have experienced a jolt of conscience, a spiritual awakening, a transformation of their minds? I think that’s possible, but our readings don’t say *that* clearly, either. We have to live with some uncertainty in our interpretation of the Bible.

But I *am* willing to say confidently that it is Jesus’ peace that is the foundation of real and lasting peace. There is a secure basis for peace in a human society when enough people have aligned themselves with the will of God. This is the basis for peace of mind and heart. We don’t know exactly howthe promise of *world* peace under Messianic leadership will be fulfilled, but we *do* know where real *spiritual* peace comes from.

And *that* is the miracle. I think the counter-intuitive promise of a peace-bringing king is a great miracle.

This is one reason why there is a tremendous amount of future hope in the Palm Sunday story, despite the tragedy that is going to follow. Palm Sunday brings together the themes of a Peace Messiah, the promise of forgiveness of sins, a triumphant reception of Jesus, followed by betrayal, arrest, and execution, but then the biggest miracle of all—the Resurrection. There is a lot of emotion that we can bring to our reflection on this holiday, since there is great sadness in this week, and then immense elation when our teacher is found to have risen from the dead.

What Jesus did is a new thing. The dramatic proof of life after death, and of Jesus having Resurrection power—these are new things. Jesus had foretold his death and resurrection, but Martha seems to be the only one who believed him beforehand. He says to her “I am the Resurrection and the life . . . . everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” and she answers “yes, Lord, I believe” (John 11:25–27).

This, too, is miraculous: this ability to listen to one’s heart and to believe something that transcends cold, hard logic. Someone once said that love is always a miracle. Life-giving love is a miracle. *That* is the miracle we get from Jesus. Yes, some jealous, power-clinging religious leaders killed him, but that was but a bump in the road. He rose from the dead because he had the power of life in him, having given us life in the first place. “In the beginning was the Word. . . . All things came into being through him” (John 1:1, 3). He is the Creator, and he has Creator power!

We are his children. We are to discover peace within ourselves, to be peace-makers in our lives, and inspirers of each other. “My peace ... I give to you” (John 14:27), Jesus said. We will meet him someday, and we can tell him about our experiences, including what we learned about his peace.