

KING'S ENTRY SUNDAY – YEAR C
April 7, 2019
Becky Robbins-Penniman
Church of the Good Shepherd, Dunedin, Florida

COLLECT OF THE DAY:

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the people of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever..

INTRODUCTION

This is a “Service of Lessons, Songs, and Reflections”

to prepare us for the second set of “high holy days” of the Christian year.

The focus of both sets of high holy days is God’s plan to save the world through Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, the Messiah, the Christ.

The first set is, of course, is the Twelve Days of Christmas through the feast of the Epiphany.

At Christmas, we hail the birth of the King of kings, the Prince of Peace.

On Epiphany we proclaim that all peoples and nations are included in the salvation that God will accomplish through Jesus, born of Mary.

We are now preparing for the second set of high holy days that begins in two weeks with the celebration of Easter.

Today, and next Sunday, and on through Holy Week, we present the big picture of the forces and events driving Jesus toward Calvary.

This service weaves together passages from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament to show how Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of the promises of God and is the Messiah of God foretold by the ancient prophecies.

We also see how humanity has long been blind to, if not downright resistant, to God’s way of establishing peace on earth and good will to all people.

THE FIRST LESSON: MICAH 4:1–4, 6–7

But in the days to come, the mountain of the LORD’s house will be the highest of the mountains; it will be lifted above the hills; peoples will stream to it. Many nations will go and say: “Come, let’s go up to the mountain of the lord, to the house of Jacob’s God, so that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in God’s paths!” Instruction will come from Zion and the LORD’S word from Jerusalem. God will judge between the nations and settle disputes of mighty nations, which are far away. They will beat their swords into iron plows and their spears into pruning tools. Nation will not take up sword against nation; they will no longer learn how to make war. All will sit underneath their own grapevines, under their own fig trees. There will be no one to terrify them; for the mouth of the LORD of heavenly forces has spoken.

On that day, says the LORD, I will gather the lame; I will assemble those who were driven away and those whom I have harmed. I will make the lame into survivors, those driven away into a mighty nation. The LORD will rule over them on Mount Zion from now on and forever.

Copyright notices: Unless otherwise noted, The Scripture text is from the Common English Bible, CEB, Copyright 2010, 2011 by Common English Bible. Used by permission. The selections from *The New Metrical Psalter – Revised Common Lectionary Edition*, are copyrighted by Christopher Webber, 2008, and published by Church Publishing, Inc., New York, NY. Unless otherwise noted, all other content is original and copyrighted by Becky Robbins-Penniman, 2019. All rights reserved by all authors and publications.

REFLECTION

What is God's dream for us, for all of creation?

Since Ash Wednesday, we have been focusing on Renewal,
 asking God to create in us a clean heart and a right spirit
 so that we can be steadfast in the storms of life
 and then love and serve each other in the very same way
 that our eternal God has loved and served us since time began.

The purpose of seeking our own renewal is so that we are aligned perfectly
 with the renewal that God is bringing about: the *tikkun olam*,
 salvation for all through the healing of creation,
 which is precisely what Micah promised nearly 3,000 years ago.

Everything Jesus did in his life was aligned with what Micah describes:

all are welcome, all are valued: the lame, the sick, and the exiled foreigner,
 as well as the active, strong and powerful, and there is abundance for all.

When God's Shalom reigns, we learn God's ways and walk in God's paths,
 and do it so completely that we even forget how to make wars happen.

Micah describes the fullness of God's victory over disease, despair and death.

The next reading, a psalm, has the description of an ancient celebration of victory,
 a jubilant procession to the Temple with leafy branches
 signs of new life and growth and fruitfulness.

Let's join our ancestors in faith in a joyful celebration of God's victory.
 as we anticipate the fulfillment of the promise of salvation for all.

PSALM 118:14–29

The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.

There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:

'The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;

the right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.'

I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.

The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness,

that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.

The Lord is God, and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

THE SECOND LESSON: 1 MACCABEES 13:7–11, 51

The spirit of the people was renewed when they heard these words. They answered loudly, “You are our leader in place of Judas and Jonathan your brothers. Fight our battles, and all that you tell us we will do.” So he assembled the warriors and rushed to complete the walls of Jerusalem and secured it on every side. He sent Jonathan, Absalom’s son, to Joppa with a sufficient army. He drove out its occupants and remained there.

On the twenty-third day of the second month, in the year 171, the Jews entered it with praise and palm branches, with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs. A great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel.

REFLECTION

Wait a minute. Micah said the Jews would even forget how to make war.

Yet, 600 years after Micah, with palm branches, harps, cymbals and stringed instruments triumphant Jews are celebrating a huge military victory.

Which way is it supposed to be? What does God really want?

Ah, there’s the rub: Just HOW is God’s promise of Shalom to be achieved?

For 10,000 years, humanity has seen force, violence, the ability to wield the powers of death, as the ultimate tool to achieve good as well as evil. An iron fist in a velvet glove.

The ends justify the means. And, indeed, we HAVE had to fight to stop true evil.

But is that GOD’s way? The Maccabean Jews believed so:

God’s Messiah would be a mighty warrior king who would first utterly vanquish his opponents and then create Shalom for everyone, with force if necessary, as the Maccabees did some 200 years before Jesus was born.

Yes, God will be victorious, God will save the world, God will heal creation.

But maybe God will not use our favorite tactics of authority, imposition, and force.

Hymn: *Come, Thou Almighty King* H’82 #365, v. 1

THE THIRD LESSON: JOHN 6:1–4, 14-15

After this Jesus went across the Galilee Sea (that is, the Tiberias Sea). A large crowd followed him, because they had seen the miraculous signs he had done among the sick. Jesus went up a mountain and sat there with his disciples. It was nearly time for Passover, the Jewish festival.

When the people saw that he had done a miraculous sign, they said, “This is truly the prophet who is coming into the world.” Jesus understood that they were about to come and force him to be their king, so he took refuge again, alone on a mountain.

REFLECTION

During Jesus’ time, the Jewish zeal for independence was as strong as it had been a thousand years earlier during the reigns of King David and King Solomon, and then Maccabees, who reigned for 200 years just before the time of Jesus.

God’s chosen people awaited a Messiah who take control and fix things.

Who better to fix things than this young prophet who healed the sick,

whose “miraculous sign” was to feed 5,000 people with a handful of tuna fish sandwiches,

and, just for good measure, who could change water to wine?

Now, don’t most of us LOVE it when people what to make us their leader!?

American politics today are proof that people will SAY almost anything, DO almost anything, to be chosen as the leader.

But, not Jesus. Jesus had no interest in that kind of power and control.

When he saw that the crowd wanted to make him a king
with the expectation he would pick up a sword
and kick the Romans out of Israel, Jesus opted out of their plans.

As we watch him take refuge away from the crowds wanting to crown him,
the conflict between our way, the way of dominance,
and God's way, the way of servanthood, is brought into stark contrast.

Hymn: *O God of Every Nation* H'82 # 607, v. 1

THE FOURTH LESSON: ISAIAH 42:1–4

But here is my servant, the one I uphold; my chosen, who brings me delight. I've put my spirit upon him; he will bring justice to the nations. He won't cry out or shout aloud or make his voice heard in public. He won't break a bruised reed; he won't extinguish a faint wick, but he will surely bring justice. He won't be extinguished or broken until he has established justice in the land. The coastlands await his teaching.

REFLECTION

Jesus' rejection of the role of Messianic warrior king wasn't based on fear;

he was fulfilling a different model, the one that the mightiest of prophets, Isaiah, consistently lifted up: As our collect for today says, the Messiah of God is one who saves the people of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, by freeing them and bringing them together under God's rule of GRACE. For Isaiah, God's gracious rule is based on "justice" to the nations.

"Justice" doesn't mean "punishment" or "retribution,"

it means restoring everything to the goodness God intended it to be from the beginning,
without human sin devastating everything.

In Isaiah's prophesies, this justice will be established not through coercive violence,

but through strong, patient, compassionate service that brings shalom to all, not just a few.

Every mission and ministry we have here at Good Shepherd is focused on this same goal of justice through strong, patient, compassionate service to all.

Hymn: *O God of Every Nation* H'82 # 607, v. 4

THE FIFTH LESSON: MATTHEW 12:14–21

The Pharisees went out and met in order to find a way to destroy Jesus.

Jesus knew what they intended to do, so he went away from there. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them all. But he ordered them not to spread the word about him, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled: *Look, my Servant whom I chose, the one I love, in whom I find great pleasure. I'll put my Spirit upon him, and he'll announce judgment to the Gentiles. He won't argue or shout, and nobody will hear his voice in the streets. He won't break a bent stalk, and he won't snuff out a smoldering wick, until he makes justice win. And the Gentiles will put their hope in his name.*

REFLECTION

The way Jesus did things, healing and teaching nobodies and foreigners, was a direct challenge to the status quo vigorously enforced by the best and brightest of that day, the Roman and Jewish leaders.

There were three powerful, dangerous groups vying for control:

First were the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and the Jewish king, Herod, political appointees of Caesar's who acted in cahoots to control their people.

Second were the some (not all) of the powerful Temple priests, who had their own police force to silence troublemakers and agitators.

The Chief Priest, also appointed by the Romans, was eager to appease them.

Third, were a good number (but not all) of the hyper-strict Pharisees, who usually detested both the Roman and Temple religious hierarchies.

These Pharisees thought Jesus was leading people away from true faith in the God of Israel, so they joined forces with the Chief Priest. Politics makes strange bedfellows.

Jesus, however, was steadfastly clear about fulfilling Isaiah's promises;

he defied all three factions to show his fellow Jews, God's chosen people, that the kind of salvation God intends for ALL people

comes not through threats, fiats, and edicts enforced at spearpoint, but through the intentional work of healing, shalom and justice.

Hymn: *Gracious Spirit, Give Your Servants* Wonder, Love and Praise, #782

THE SIXTH LESSON: ZECHARIAH 9:9-14

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion. Sing aloud, Daughter Jerusalem. Look, your king will come to you. He is righteous and victorious. He is humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the offspring of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem. The bow used in battle will be cut off; he will speak peace to the nations. His rule will stretch from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Moreover, by the blood of your covenant, I will release your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, prisoners of hope. Moreover, declare today that I will return double to you.

REFLECTION

Always, humanity will reap what we sow, we will find what we seek now.

As Jesus will say when the Temple police come to arrest him,

Those who use the sword will die by the sword. (Mt. 26:52)

Jesus embodied another way, one the ancient prophet, Zechariah, had promised: the Jewish people would be freed, but not by an army. Armies use warhorses.

Humble farmers and merchants use donkeys.

This king's battle was not for land or power, but for the human heart.

Martial prowess would not bring a lasting victory.

As I've said, the slow, patient work of God will, in God's good time, heal all creation

with or without our cooperation, just as yeast works in dough in the yeast's good time, not the baker's.

God's Shalom, the *tikkun olam*, the of healing Creation, happens through the renewal of our hearts.

If what Zechariah describes is what we WANT for ourselves and our children,

we need clean hearts and renewed spirits from God that are bold enough

to embody Jesus' way in a world that is still often blind and resistant to it.

living as Zechariah puts it, as prisoners of hope; *prisoners* because we are

bound up and bound together in the love and presence of God.

METRICAL PSALM: 8 [Tune: *Azmon*, O, For a Thousand Tongues]

O Lord our God, in all the earth your great Name is extolled;
 Your majesty is far beyond what heaven itself can hold.
 You have ordained that children's lips should praise your Name today,
 That all your enemies and foes should have no more to say.

THE SEVENTH LESSON: LUKE 19:29-40

As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'"

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

They replied, "The Lord needs it."

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

REFLECTION

Luke says people put cloaks on the road instead of palm branches.

Matthew and Mark have palms AND clothes; John has only palms.

Bible scholars say that for most poor people (and Luke was especially concerned with the poor) their outer cloak was the most valuable thing they owned.

Luke has the disciples giving their best possession to praise and honor Jesus.

But, not wanting the Vice Squad to raid us, we'll let you keep your clothes on and stick with palm fronds, if that's OK with you?

In Luke's story, the ancient prophecies, and the peoples' hopes for a Messiah, are provocatively affirmed when Jesus sits on the back of Zechariah's donkey.

Jesus is saying: I am the Blessed one, I come in the name of the Lord.

But Jesus doesn't suddenly morph into a warrior king.

Jesus the Teacher, the Healer, the Reconciler, the Forgiver, is going to be exactly the same kind of King when he saves all the nations.

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.

The Savior saves by transforming creation itself, including us, bringing heaven and earth together until all Creation is filled with God's glory.

The question always before humanity, since Adam and Eve, is whether we actually want this kind of salvation.

In the kind of salvation Jesus promises, God, and only God is praised.

All people of all nations, all types and sizes and languages, are equal before the throne of grace.

Each one of us is so precious that God is willing to give everything to save even just one of us,
but not one of us is so special that we get to tell God who is worthy of salvation.
We will soon shout HOSANNA, which literally means, "God save us!"

How big is our "US"?

Today, we will shout HOSANNA quite a few times during the entire service,
including during the celebration of the Eucharist.

All of Lent we've asked, for ourselves, that God give us a clean heart
and to renew a right spirit within us.

Today, may all hearts and spirits and eyes here be open, all resistance melt,
so that we are praying with all our might
that the US that, deep down, we WANT God to save
indeed includes people of the earth, all lands, all clans, and all times,
that we may be freed and brought together under God's rule of grace.

HOSANNA!

Hymn: *Prepare the Royal Highway* ELW #264