



SUNNYVALE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

728 W. Fremont Avenue • Sunnyvale, CA 94087
408.739.1892 • www.svpc.us • info@svpc.us

From the Pulpit

Sermon Series ~ *A Long Road in the Same Direction: Jesus' Journey Towards Jerusalem*

Sermon ~ *The Things That Make for Peace*

The Rev. Dr. Steve Harrington ~ April 17, 2011

Micah 4:1-4

Luke 19:35-46

Last week CNN online posted an article about a Google project that some of you might be working on! The article was about their image-recognition software called Google Goggles. Google Goggles is a visual search application (it works now only with android phones) that lets you take a picture of something on your phone – say a painting or a famous landmark – then transmit the picture back to the Google servers where a complex set of algorithms compare the images in your photos with known images in the Google database and, in a matter of seconds, it identifies the artist or the landmark for you. In other words, *it can recognize what you see*. It's still in development so it's not so good at recognizing plants or animals or human faces – but they're working on that because Google knows that we don't always recognize what we see.

This was Jesus' exact lament when he entered the holy city on that first Palm Sunday: he wept because the people did not recognize what they saw – they missed the point and focused on the wrong thing. Friends, one of the great spiritual problems of our day is our failure to recognize and really understand what we see.

Jesus chastises the religiously religious people in particular because while they saw him entering the holy city, they did not recognize the time of their visitation. Jesus rides into Jerusalem in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah as the Messiah King– the one who comes in the name of the Lord. But they can't recognize him for who he really is. They can't see beyond their preconceptions and prejudices. They're blinded by their privilege and power.

In particular Jesus grieves their failure to recognize the things which make for peace. It's a poignant moment that Luke describes in our text today and those of us who have been to Jerusalem have a little sense of at least the topography of how this day might have looked. Like some of you, I've stood up on the ridge above the Mount of Olives with the village of Bethany behind me. I've walked up over that hill towards Jerusalem to where the land just drops off in front of you down into that deep ravine that is the Kidron Valley. Then, as you lift your eyes, rising up on the other side of the ravine you see the eastern wall and the golden roof of the Dome of the Rock and the holy city, Jerusalem.

It's a stirring thing to know that somewhere in the proximity of where you are Jesus ended the final leg of his journey to Jerusalem that had begun, as Luke tells it, back in chapter 9 verse 51. Historians have recorded that at the time of the great festivals – like the Passover which Jesus was arriving in Jerusalem to celebrate – that when the pilgrims came over this rise on their way to Jerusalem and caught their first glimpse of the holy city in all its glory they would just burst out in praise and singing.

It's in this context – in this energy and excitement – that Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey at the beginning of Passover week. It would not be lost on those walking with him that Jesus is fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah that the Messiah would come triumphant and victorious; yet humble and riding on a donkey. The prophecy says he will "cut off the chariot and the war-horse and the battle bow shall be cut off and he shall command peace to the nations."

There is on that first Palm Sunday a great foment of praise, a great outpouring of joy – the other gospel writers tell us that people were throwing palms down before him, throwing down their garments and cloaks before his path as a sign of honor and reverence. What we see on this day is a great crescendo of praise and expectation that the Messiah is at last coming into the holy city and he will overthrow the oppressors and conquer their enemies and establish the kingdom of Israel forever. *But...* right in the middle of all of the shouting and praise there is this salient moment of lament by Jesus.

If I were the director of a movie trying to capture this moment I'd heighten the contrast of emotions at this point. As Jesus first crests the hill and the pilgrims reach a fevered pitch I'd raise the volume on them and then suddenly have the raucous sound of the crowd fade off into reverberating silence; maybe the people would be shown suddenly moving in slow motion – still shouting out their words of praise, still throwing down their palms in celebration but it would all recede into a distant and disconnected background. And then there would be this close up moment of Jesus and this great anguished cry would break from his lips – a cry that would be in such contrast to all of the joy and celebration around him that you'd know that two completely different stories are going on here. Jesus would cry out the words of verse 42, "If you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they're hidden from your eyes".

The crowds think they see Jesus, they think he's the Messiah of their dreams: their conquering hero, their victorious King – the one to overthrow their enemies and restore the nation. They *see* him... but they don't *recognize* him. And because they don't recognize him they don't recognize the things that make for peace.

Friends, I have to tell you that in all the ways that we might most closely approximate that first Palm Sunday today – you know, with all the elements of the day like our songs of celebration and our remembrance of the story and even the palms that are scattered about here in our sanctuary – in all the ways that we might most closely approximate the reality of that first Palm Sunday I fear that our *most* resonant moment with this story is that as a people we still fail to recognize the things which make for peace.

The Bible defines a path for peace different than the one we are pursuing in our country today. We seem to think that peace is a function of power; or at least the ability to protect ourselves from all that would threaten. Peace then becomes little more than the pursuit of our national interests and the protection and preservation of life as we like it. At a time when we are cutting programs that assist the poor and needy while increasing our spending on armies and war it would seem we believe that what makes for peace is power.

But for Jesus what makes for peace is the cross; it's a willingness to be broken for the sake of wholeness, to respond with grace rather than aggression. The things that make for peace seeks

justice over economic gain, freedom over control – hope instead of oil. For Jesus the things that make for peace are found in the cross that transforms the worst of the world into the best God can offer. The peace of the cross its ability to liberate not dominate.

In Micah's vision of God's coming peace swords are beat into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks and nations no longer lift up sword against one another. But notice also in Micah's vision that the peoples "all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees."

Jim Wallis, president of sojourners, a Christian social justice organization writes of this Micah text, "The prophet's insight is that the possibility for peace... depends upon everyone having enough for their own security – having a little vine and a fig tree.... If the tremendous gaps on our planet can be leveled out just a little, nobody would have to be so afraid. Micah understood that it was the great imbalances and ambitions that lead to war. Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams says it well, "There is no security apart from common security."

Peace has to do with economic justice and stopping oppression. It has to do with beating swords into plowshares and ending exploitation; it's more than just "pursuing national interests" it's about healing the world. Peace is neither the result of power nor the preservation of life as we like it. Nor is peace passive; it must be forged out of the struggle for what is right and just and fair. The truth is we do not make peace with war.

In their book, *The Last Week*, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan write that on that first Palm Sunday there were actually *two* processions into Jerusalem. There's the one we know about, Jesus' triumphal entry from Bethany, down through the Mount of Olives into the eastern gates of Jerusalem. But they rightly note that on the same day there would have also been a Roman imperial procession coming into Jerusalem from the West. At the beginning of the great festivals in Israel when the population of Jerusalem would swell with the energy and excitement of pilgrims all looking for the day of their redemption and liberation it was standard practice that the Roman governor would come to the city from where he usually resided in the port town of Caesarea in order to ensure the Pax Romana – the peace of the land enforced by the power of Rome. To demonstrate that Rome was in charge he would ride into town with a great show of strength.

What a contrast these 2 processions are! Pilate, the Roman governor, entering the city from the west with all the fanfare of the world's most powerful nation in a military procession led by mounted Calvary and marching soldiers; it's a demonstration of strength complete with rattling shields and flashing swords –there's the beating of drums and the unmistakable air and arrogance of a nation that will brook no challenge and bury all contenders.

But on that same day winding down the rugged path from the east, from the Mount of Olives Jesus rides, not on a white horse of victory but on the foal of a donkey, dragging his feet on the ground and weeping over a city that cannot recognize what it sees – that does not know the things that make for peace. Two roads into the Holy city; 2 visions of peace for the world.

Palm Sunday 2011 and we get to choose again which procession we want to be part of; which peace we want to pursue. Will we support and encourage the Imperial procession of power or will we lay down our lives to be a part of God's vision of peace? Will we seek to dominate the world for our own national and self interests or will we take the way of the cross and work for *God's* liberation? Will we hold on to what we have and protect the life we love or will we work to see that others can sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees so that *all* can enjoy a shared security? In this house of prayer let us wait upon God, let us work in the world and let us seek to recognize those things that make for peace...*God's* peace.