

THE THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE

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Palm/Passion Sunday

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Luke 19:28-42

As Jesus rode along people spread their cloaks on the road. The whole multitude began to praise God. "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" As Jesus came near Jerusalem, he wept, saying: "If you, even you, had only recognized the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

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I realize we are in the midst of a presidential campaign, so please don't read too much into this, but the story of Palm Sunday is the story of Jesus confronting the establishment.

And don't read too much into this, but he did it while riding on a donkey.

And don't read too much into this, but once he got through the wall enclosing Jerusalem he smashed the tables of the Temple bankers who were exploiting the poor.

Don't read too much into any of that, but you can read all you want into this: *When Jesus looked upon Jerusalem, the so-called City of Peace, he wept and cried out: "If only, if only you knew the things that make for peace."*

On that day, Jerusalem was surrounded by battalions of the Roman Empire armed to the teeth to prevent an insurrection. The Empire wanted world peace and it would kill anyone who got in the way. Peace through victory and conquest was its way. The city was guarded by the strongest military force on earth, not unlike the military force that guards the American way of life all around the world.

Jesus wept and cried out: "If only, if only you knew the things that make for peace."

On that day Jerusalem was full of the elite who had robbed the poor and padded their comforts and privileges with deceit and oppression, not unlike those in our nation who protect privilege and pad their comforts at the expense of the poor.

Jesus wept and cried out: "If only, if only you knew the things that make for peace."

On that day, the multitude, shaking palm branches and prancing with Jesus into Jerusalem, was full of desperate people. They bore grievances against the establishment and the elite. It was an angry mob that felt victimized and impotent. The masses yearned for a savior, a messiah, a strong man who would crush the establishment and the elite and save them from despair.

Hosanna, hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD, which is to say, blessed is the one who comes in the power of the LORD, a LORD who a thousand years before had drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea in order to free their ancestors from slavery. Only violence will end violence—or so they thought as many still think today.

Jesus strode into Jerusalem with that vociferous mob at the beginning of Passover Week. The bloody story of the Exodus and the almighty God who slaughtered their enemy was on their minds, in their prayers and at the Seder meal, a meal Jesus would soon eat with his disciples in an upper room. Death to the Romans would resound at every table in the land—at every table but one.

Jesus wept: "If only, if only you knew the things that make for peace."

But the establishment isn't just out there. It's in our hearts as well. Domination and violence often rule our hearts. We look down on others. We shout down those who disagree with us or dismiss them with a smirk. We don't listen.

We rob others of their dignity. We build walls around our lives and deport disagreeable people. We look for scapegoats and refuse to take responsibility for our own lives. We are afraid to be vulnerable, afraid to ask or offer forgiveness.

And then Jesus rides through the walls of our heart, which is to say, love appears and weeps. *If only, if only you knew the things that make for peace.*

Jesus refused the sword. Instead he fed the hungry, healed the sick, welcomed outcasts to his table and forgave those who nailed him to the cross. The Romans had one way to world peace. Jesus had another.

Jesus loved his enemies, but he would not let them get away with murder. On Palm Sunday Jesus led a band of children waving palm branches. He rode upon a donkey as a way to mock the rulers who sat upon their stallions, dressed in shiny armor waving their bloody swords.

And Jesus wept.

Before the week was out he would offer his broken body and spilt blood as a new way, the way of vulnerability, the way of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Not an almighty God; but rather a wounded God with holes in his hands.