

CONTRASTING KINGDOMS

Mark 11:1-11

March 25, 2018

Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

Introduction:

**It has always seemed a little schizophrenic
to spend all the other Sundays of Lent
talking about Jesus' last week,
then having to back up and celebrate Palm Sunday.**

I mean, shouldn't Lent begin with Palm Sunday?

Well, no one asked me.

City of Contrasts:

**This morning, I want to take a different look
at the contrasts of what is going on during Palm Sunday.**

**All of these contrasts take place
in the city of Jerusalem –
which is a city of contrasts in itself.**

**Jerusalem – city of God,
and at the same time a faithless city.**

**Designed to be a city of hope, the place of the Temple of God,
which has, instead, become a city of oppression.**

**What should be a city of joy,
is a city of pain.**

It is to this city, Jesus has come to confront the authorities.

A Day of Two Processions:

**One thing our Bible does not tell us – but historians do tell us –
Jesus' procession into Jerusalem
was not the only procession the city saw that day.**

On that same day,

**Roman historians record that the governor of Judea,
Pontius Pilate, led a procession of Roman cavalry
and centurions into the city of Jerusalem.**

So, here we have another contrast:

**one procession was a peasant entry;
the other an imperial one.**

**Jesus' entry proclaimed the kingdom of God;
Pilate's proclaimed the power of Imperial Rome.**

**It was standard practice for Roman governors of Judea
to be in Jerusalem for major Jewish festivals.**

**This was not out of reverence of Jewish traditions
or to pay homage to Jewish custom,
it was to have a military presence in case of trouble.**

**Sort of like calling out the National Guard
on St. Patrick's Day or Cinco de Mayo.**

**So, you have contrasting purposes –
Jesus is preaching peace –
Rome is legislating peace.**

Contrasting Theology:

The contrasts do not end there.

There are also contrasting theologies.

**Roman imperial theology held that the emperor
was not simply the ruler of Rome, but the Son of God.**

**Caesar Augustus was said to be the son of the God Apollo.
The emperors who came after him also held titles
referring to them as gods.**

**So, Pilate's procession not only represented a rival social order,
but a rival theology;
it proclaims the kingdom of Caesar.**

Just imagine the spectacle of that entry.

**From the western side of the city,
the opposite side from which Jesus enters,
Pontius Pilate leads Roman soldiers.**

**Each soldier is fully armed and well trained,
drummers beat out the cadence of march.**

**Pilate, as governor of the region which included not only Judea,
but Samaria, and Idumea,
was in the capital for its religious celebrations.**

**It was the beginning of Passover,
a strange Jewish festival that the Romans allowed,
a festival celebrated the liberation of the Jews
from another empire, the empire of Egypt.**

**There would be no rebellion during Pilate's rule!
None whatsoever!**

**At the other side of the city,
there was another procession –
a procession to declare the exact opposite of Pilate's.**

**Both Matthew and Mark record Jesus's own words,
as he instructs his disciples to go in to the city
and find a donkey tied up.**

**They are to ask the owner if they may use the donkey,
and they are to say that "the Lord needs them."**

**Then, Jesus quotes from Zechariah, the 9th chapter –
"Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'**

**But, there is more to this passage
than just a description of Jesus' means of transportation.**

The prophet Zechariah is speaking to the nation.

**He reassures the people of Judah
that God has not forgotten them:**

**But I will defend my house against marauding
forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my
people, for now I am keeping watch.**

**Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout,
Daughter of Jerusalem!**

***See, your king comes to you, righteous and having
salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the
foal of a donkey.***

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

In other words, Jesus' quote from the prophet Zechariah reminded those who heard him of the entire passage.

**The message they heard was,
"God will deliver the nation from the oppressor"—
in this case, Rome!**

**But, the king they seek will come to them humbly,
not on a steed of war, but on a slow-moving donkey,
the symbol of a king who comes in peace,
according to Zechariah.**

**The two processions could not be more different
in the messages they convey.**

**Pilate, leading Roman centurions, asserts the power and might
of the empire of Rome which crushes all who oppose it.**

**Jesus, riding on a young donkey,
embodies the peace and tranquility - the shalom –
that God brings to His people.**

Those who watch that day will make a choice.

**They will either serve the god of this world,
a god that promises might and power;**

or they will choose to serve the king
of a very different kind of kingdom,
the kingdom of God.

Conclusion:

In their book titled, *Leadership on the Line*,

Marty Linsky and Ron Heifetz define leadership this way:

“Leadership is about disappointing your own people at a rate they can absorb.”

Jesus’ followers and others
get caught up in his entry into Jerusalem
and think they are choosing to follow Jesus.

Unfortunately, they are making that choice for the same reasons
the Pharisees and others sided with Rome.

They thought Jesus could do for them
what Rome had done for their rulers—
make their lives better, deliver them
from the oppressive system
under which they lived and worked,
and turn the tables on the Romans.

But by the end of the week,
Jesus will have disappointed the crowd
at a rate faster than they can stand.

They will turn on Him.
They will call for His crucifixion and death.

They will spit on Him and curse Him.

**Even those closest to Jesus, the 12 disciples,
will either betray him outright,
or abandon him in confusion and fear.
They will scatter and deny Him.**

**Once again, we have arrived at a moment
when we must make a very personal decision.**

**Ask yourself, “If I had been in Jerusalem that day,
if I had seen both processions passing by,
which would I have chosen to follow?”**

**My beloved sisters and brothers,
that is the choice we make each and every day.
To choose power and might over love.
To choose “the way things are done”
over “the way God intends them to be.”**

**Two processions. Two theologies. Two choices.
Which would you choose?**

PRAYER:

Take us by the hand, God of Mercy and Strength, and lead us into a deeper faith in You. When we have gone as far as our courage will allow, whisper words of encouragement to us and assure us You are with us. Pick us up when we fall, dust us off, and lead us back onto the paths you have set before us. Let us feel Your love and may we

respond to You with even greater love for You. This we pray in the name of Jesus, who trod the toughest path of all, Amen.