

Palm Sunday

Order of Worship for April 17, 2011, Palm Sunday

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Missions

Call to Worship: Isaiah 52:1-10 & Zechariah 9:9 and Prayer

Special Music: Evangelical Free Church Sunday School Children

Songs of Worship:

“Prince of Peace”

“We Will Glorify”

“O Worship the King”

“All Glory, Laud and Honor”

Overhead

Song # 301

Song # 104

Song # 300

Offering:

Special Music: Highest Praise/Hosanna (?)

Message: “Parable and Prophecy” (Luke 19:11-27 & 41-48)
By Pastor Bronson

Closing Song: “We Will Glorify” [yes, this is different!] Song # 105

Parting Word of Grace

Vespers

A study in Hebrews

5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in the Library

“The Prayer Closet”

April 10, 2011

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Russel and Sharla Weisner serving in Malaysia:** their prayer and financial support will remain strong; the Lord will grant them favor in the eyes of government officials; Spirit will soften the hearts and open the minds of many Muslims, Hindus and animists to the gospel
2. **President Obama:** will rise above partisan commitments and gain a true sense of our national purpose and need under Christ; will be enabled by the Spirit to see reality through a Biblical lens; will find peace with God through Christ
3. **Missions Committee and Support:** all preparations for and participation at the Wycliffe Banquet will be honoring to the Lord; our congregation will joyfully and generously support missionary organizations and personnel; the hearts of young and old will be open to the Lord’s call to local and cross-cultural missions
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: Pri. Cody Henneker** (grandson of Dick and Jane Miller):
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Joshua and Lina Bronson at the University of London** (son and daughter-in-law of John and Nini Bronson):

[As Christians,] if we know why we have gathered together, our hearts sing. But today’s message, because [of] today’s celebration, is a difficult one. I have entitled the comments today “Parables and Prophecy”. The passage that we are looking at has to do with Palm Sunday, the day of Jesus’ triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. [The text is Luke 19:11-27 and 41-46.] It is interesting if you are well acquainted at all with church history to realize that for a variety of reasons Christians no longer celebrate quite a number of Christian holidays. They have simply dropped by the way. We no longer celebrate Pentecost, or

Ascension. We no longer celebrate Epiphany. We don't even celebrate Reformation Sunday, thought that would be essential for defining who we are. This coming week we will have a Good Friday Service, but we won't have a Maundy Thursday communion service. Many of the Christian celebrations have dropped away as the culture at larger has ceased to be Christian, and so there is not any support.

One, however, of the holidays we do celebrate is Palm Sunday. And of the ones that we support I would say that Paul Sunday is the most difficult for you and [me] to know how to identify with it. This is the day that Jesus arrived and entered Jerusalem as her king, the king who would sit on David's throne. That was predicted. You find the prediction in Zechariah 9:9. This is what the prophet told the people of Israel. He said, *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Should aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”* That is exactly what Jesus did. He rode into the city of Jerusalem riding on the foal, the colt of a donkey. It was an event for the Jews to get excited about, and they did get excited about it. That is what the Gospels tell us. In fact if you turn to Luke you will see that in 19:36-38 Luke give us a description of the excitement of the Jews as Jesus came riding into the city. This is what he said, *“And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’”* So they were excited. For the Jews the coming of the Messiah was much as we Christians anticipate the Second Coming of Jesus. The coming of the Messiah was supposed to be the hour when all of the enemies of the Jewish people were defeated, when all the times of their troubles and sorrows came to an end, when poverty would be eliminated, when oppression would be eliminated, and they would become the first kingdom upon the face of the earth! It was a very exciting prospect, particularly for a people who had already been oppressed under foreign rulers for over two hundred years.

You and I do not well identify with kings and kingdoms. We know that eventually Jesus will establish the kingdom of heaven on earth and then the kingdom of God will be an earthly kingdom, but that is not the way it is right now. We know that. For us the rule of Christ is something that takes place primarily in the hearts of believers. We come to faith and we submit to Him as our Lord. Usually it is a rather private thing, certainly a personal thing, a personal relationship of faith between the believer and God. By contrast Jesus was welcomed here on Palm Sunday by jubilant crowds shouting out in public demonstration regarding their excitement and joy in anticipation. And then, of course, within six days they are silent, and a very different kind of crowd is shouting out: *“Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”*

If you know about crowds, if you have been in crowds, you know that a crowd is a very powerful thing. We like, most of us, to be in crowds. This is one of the reasons we go to big sports events. I can remember an occasion when as a young man I walked innocently, for the first time ever, not having any clue what it was like to walk into an ice hockey game. I am not

a crowd guy, so I’m walking up – and you know how they have those big doors – I do not know what happened on the rink at that moment, but we opened the door and the noise had such intensity that it was absolutely overwhelming. We like concerts in which we get revved up; political rallies: “Yes! Yes! Yes!” They also do this at evangelistic crusades.

All four Gospels recount the Triumphal Entry. Crowds are emotion driven rather than reason driven. Therefore crowds are easily manipulated, which is one reason why it is wise not to hang out with crowds. The Triumphal Entry called together a great crowd. It was an exciting and an intense moment. The four Gospels do not necessarily, however, present the Triumphal Entry in the same way, which is to say, they view it from slightly different perspectives, which is one reason why it is good to have all four. Luke puts the account of the Triumphal Entry between a parable and a prophecy. That is why I have entitled the message the way I have for today. Both of those should help us to understand the event, what it meant for the Jews from God’s perspective, and it is this, of course, God’s perspective, that we want to pay attention to. Let us read those sections again: Luke 19:11-27 and 41-46.

“As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. He said therefore, ‘A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’ Then another came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’ He said to him, ‘I will condemn you with your own word, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’ And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’ And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten minas!’ ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.’”

“And when he drew near and saw the city, [Jesus] wept over it, saying, ‘Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will

set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, and you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’ And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be a house of prayer,” but you have made it a den of robbers.’”

What do the parable and the prophecy have to tell us about what the Triumphal Entry meant? First consider the parable. The parable talks about two different kinds of citizens. On the one hand there is the servant-citizen who is willing to accept responsibilities from his lord. On the other hand there are the discontented citizens, the ones who do not want this man to be their lord. These people hated, we are told, hated the nobleman and did not want him to be the king. There is no doubt when you read the parable in context of the Gospels exactly what Jesus was saying. Jesus was saying the majority of the Jews do not want their Messiah. Most particularly the ones who did not want Jesus to be the Messiah were the wealthy, the powerful, the privileged members of the political and religious and social elite, or those who envied the wealthy and the powerful members of the elite. What we understand is that at that time the religious and political establishment, the privileged people of the land and many of the others as well, looked for and anticipated a Messiah who would confirm them in their advantages, who would fulfill their dreams and would honor their ambitions. That is what they wanted. What they did not want was a Messiah who questioned them in every aspect of their lives. They did not want that, of course! Jesus, as we realize, refers to these discontented [citizens] right at the end of the parable, where He says, “...as for these enemies of mine, who do not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them...” These are the people of the world. We are told quite explicitly here that God views such people as His enemies. Jesus has pronounced a perfectly terrible judgment. They are chilling words. We can scarcely imagine the Jesus that we worship to say such things. But He did, and it is obvious that He intends that we understand that is what He is going to do when He returns.

That is a good place to stop and ask ourselves, “Am I in heart and mind truly submitted to and in agreement to my God, particularly when I rather casually say, ‘O I’m so eager for the Lord to return!’?” To have a sober, realistic understanding of what that means is to write down a list of those people you love who would die because they don’t know the Lord. That could have something to do with our prayers. God has not called us out from the world in order that we could spend our time enjoying and celebrating our special privileges. What He has called us out to do is to live like Christ and to make known the glory and the truths of His gospel that others might be saved.

All this brings us to the prophecy, looking at Luke 19:41-46. This is what He said,
“And when he drew near and saw the city, Jesus wept, saying, ‘Would that you, even you, had known this day, had known the things that make for peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set

a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’ And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be a house of prayer,” but you have made it a den of robbers.’”

What Luke describes here occurred at the same time as what he [described] in verses 36-38. We have a very compelling picture and it is one that I think scripture wants, God wants, us to have firmly in mind. You need to see here on the edge of the Mount of Olives and approaching the City of Jerusalem through the Kidron Valley is that all around this road there are these shouting and celebrant people; they are waving palm branches and they are throwing their cloaks on the ground, and they are nothing but jubilant. And in the middle of them the One who is the supposed object of all this excitement, Jesus, is riding on this donkey and He is weeping, and it is not for joy. That should generate within us a very powerful tension.

How differently they saw the events of that day! Of course Jesus knows. Jesus is riding on the donkey and He knows exactly what this event is leading to. He has no illusions. What He says is, it is over! It is done! You missed it! You don’t know! The judgment is determined. Forty years later the armies of Rome surrounded that city and they reduced it to dust. The slaughter is estimated to have been as high as a million. O, my goodness! The Jews were scattered. They did not return until 1946. Even after that return as a stiff-necked and rebellious people, they still have no liberty; they cannot rebuild their temple. There is a mosque sitting on Temple Mount. And they still refuse the Messiah. You and I need to be very conscious of the fact that Israel consistently persecutes Christians within her boundaries. There is no great love for our Lord there.

It is very interesting, isn’t it, as you look at that scene? The prophecy warns us to look for the difference in perspective between God’s point of view and man’s. We realize here the excitement of the crowds and the weeping of Jesus.

All who are familiar with the Gospels, of the history of Jesus our Savior, know the story of this final week of His earthly life. The crowds [which] had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the annual Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, were swept up in the excitement of that smaller number of Jews who had become followers of Jesus. But if you look with care, you will realize in the 37th verse that Luke is very careful to say that the reason they were following Jesus was because of all the wonderful things He had done. Most human beings love miracles. The most recent of the miracles had been the raising of Lazarus, the good friend of Jesus, the brother of Martha and Mary, in Bethany, not more than five miles from Jerusalem. Many people, we know, came from Jerusalem to commiserate with the sisters in the death of their brother, and how the word regarding the raising of Lazarus from the dead went throughout the entire city. And my, my, don’t you think you would have been excited to know that somebody had raised a dead person? But by the end of the week, they were gone.

On the fateful night of His betrayal and arrest even those personally selected by Jesus would desert Him and deny knowing Him. As for the rest of the crowd: silence, safely out of view, while a rabble minority were manipulated by the Pharisees and Sadducees into shouting out, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.”

Up close when we are caught in the swirl and immediacy of events we are rarely able to understand what is actually happening; often we are doing well just to keep our heads on straight and not get swept away with the passions of the rest. So it is well worth asking yourself this question: “How would we have handled the events of that day when Jesus rode into the City?” In order for us to let the Word of God talk to us, we have to let ourselves identify with what is happening on those pages. We have to be willing to take a role in some of the drama. So I am inviting you to do that. If we had been there on that day when Jesus came riding on the colt of the donkey, that day when He came down the hill, and we were pilgrims from the empire and we had come to the City to celebrate the great liberation of Israel from Egypt: we had heard rumors already of this remarkable preacher who had performed many amazing things, and then we hear he had raised somebody from the dead, and then we walk over and see this man riding on the donkey and he is fulfilling the prophecy! How would we have responded? Would we have been swept up, letting all of our hopes rush forward, finally giving them free play, seizing the imagination of our hearts and our minds, projecting the end of misery and the birth of good days? Or, as the week began to unfold, we saw that day after day this guy would come and preach in the Temple and then he would go away. The Pharisees and the Sadducees did nothing about it. And Jesus did nothing except preach in the Temple and go away and hide at night. Is that how a Messiah arrives; is that what a Messiah does; is that the way he handles a situation; is that the way he brings solutions, how he brings an end to all the troubles? The Roman guards continue to stand; the wealthy continue to parade; the people in the Temple continue to be ripped off: is that what a Messiah does? And so some time during the week do you think you too would have stepped back from the crowd, let your lips grow silent and instead of being the celebrant become the skeptic? Who, after all, is he, and what is he doing? Until finally by the end of the week would disappointment and disillusionment have been powerful enough to have turned your perceptions completely around so that instead of Jesus being the Messiah, he was just another false prophet come to deceive God’s people and to further embitter the hearts of the hopeful?

Beloved, I believe that that is a journey inwardly that we ought to take in company with the Holy Spirit in order that the Spirit of God would help us know who we are, for we are common flesh and we are subject to weakness. You and I have a great need, an immense need for the grace of God through the Spirit of God to sustain us on the path of faith.

There are some interesting things to take note of here that sort of sit just underneath the surface of the narrative, things that maybe will help us to understand more about the God who loves us and whom we love. This is the first: God weeps. He weeps in the face of humanity’s sin. That is what is happening, we understand, as Jesus rides down the Mount of

Olives. His is weeping because He knows these sinners are lost. They are slaves to their sin. But notice, our God continues to weep even in the face of judgment. Jesus is very explicit; it is over! You’ve missed it! The judgment has fallen! And He weeps. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the shattering of Jerusalem with horrendous slaughter is now determined. But notice; God’s sorrow reflects His mercies, but at this point it does not alter His judgment. It is not the case that Jesus is powerless to alter this judgment, for it is the judgment which He Himself has decreed. There is no dissension, no disagreement between Jesus and His Father. By now the demands of mercy and kindness, of long suffering and compassion have all been fulfilled. Now it is done. Having rejected the clear word of truth and the perfect example of grace and God’s tender mercies, the Jews have chosen for themselves God’s judgment, and Jesus weeps. But it does not change. This is the message of the prophecy. We do not do rightly when we play God’s mercy against God’s judgment; they are perfectly agreed with one another.

What about the parable? Why did Luke place the parable just here as the introduction to the Triumphal Entry? John did not, nor did Matthew, nor did Mark. Matthew and Mark put the healing of the blind men on the Jericho road right before the account of the Triumphal Entry: how hopeful! Maybe the Jews’ eyes will still be opened before judgment falls! Happy thought. Right after the account they speak of the cleansing of the temple: robbers is what they had become. John speaks of the plot by the chief priests to kill Lazarus whom Jesus had just raised from the dead. He follows with the account of some Greeks seeking Jesus’ disciples in order to find out who is this man? This is a theme throughout John’s Gospel, that when Jesus comes He comes to bring salvation to all the nations of the earth. So we see that theme written into John’s presentation of the Entry. Matthew, Mark and Luke all make the statement very powerfully that God intends for His house to be a house of prayer, and it is to be house of prayer for all the nations.

Luke is no less clear but even more emphatic regarding God’s judgment against the Jews and the setting aside of Israel as the people of God. Immediately after the prophecy we again have a description of Jesus cleansing the temple because the Jews have betrayed His purpose as a house of prayer. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple fulfills the removal of Israel as the people of God demanded by that betrayal. Few places in scripture speak more powerfully of God’s passion for our prayers. Did you hear what I said? I am not now speaking of Jews who died two thousand years ago. We are the temple of God; that is exactly what we are told by Paul. We are the temple of God, and the question which therefore arises is, “Are we standing in the way of judgment?” Do we pray, and do we pray for the nations? Because, beloved, when it is over, it is over!

What does the parable say? What did it say to them, what does it say to us today? These two will necessarily be almost the same thing. This is what the parable says: some people hate Jesus. They don’t want Him to rule. We are told explicitly how Jesus handles that; when He returns He deals with them accordingly. In the words of that most gracious of queens, the Queen of Hearts from Louis Carroll, “Off with their heads!” Only this is not fantasy. The

parable also tells us there are two kinds of servants. There are the servants who accept responsibility and go to work. Then there are the servants who seem to accept responsibility, but don't go to work. The results of this are clearly stated. If anyone was looking for a place in the teaching of Jesus as the foundation of Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:10, this would be it. This is what Paul wrote: *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”* That is exactly what Jesus indicates in this parable, although obviously on a limited basis. Jesus the returning king will richly reward those who accept responsibility and willing work for Him as they wait for His return. The reward they receive is a huge increase in responsibility, from commercial ventures to ruling cities is what He indicates. For those who will not work, the outcome is different. You can read it for yourselves.

Beloved, it is hard to resist the excitement of a crowd. I suppose that is why they are fun to be part of. As I mentioned before we like to be in crowds in sports events, in concerts and political rallies, even in worship services and evangelistic crusades. In the same way, a rightly presented gospel is hard to resist. Who can resist forgiveness from God, free access to heaven, an eternity of joy as opposed to whatever fears may shadow our minds? Who wouldn't choose the gospel and heaven? But that is not the choice. This is not the gospel. It is no kindness to any to lead them to or let them think that it is. The gospel is the good news that through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the guilt of our sin is removed and we can be reconciled to God and restored to fellowship with the Almighty and once again agree with the purposes of our Creator. The good news, you see, is that by God's grace we can now follow Jesus. Following Jesus we can become what God originally made us to be: servants of the Most High, who accept responsibilities and work hard to fulfill them. In this way we glorify God. Beloved, I do not want in the last day to stand before my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and have Him look at me and say, “Why didn't you tell them the truth? Why did you allow them to entertain the false notion that they could be saved with no change in their life?” So I am telling you, you cannot. When you accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you accept Him as your Lord, and as your Lord, he is your Master, and as your Master, He is calling you to be His servant. If you will not serve, read the parable. But if you will, you and I share an anticipation of joy which nothing on earth can even begin to equal. So may each of us by the grace of the Living God listen and obey the Lord Who loves us.

Pray with me: Our heavenly Father, you are gracious. O, we think, we think of how long You waited for Israel. Paul says at the end of the [tenth chapter of Romans] that You stood with Your arms extended, waiting, waiting, waiting for a disobedient people and they would not come. By Your grace, O may it be different with us. May we respond to the prompting of your Holy Spirit, hear the Word of God that He lays upon our hearts and be bent to Your purposes and fulfill, O God, as your servants to know the glory and goodness of Your promises poured into our hearts that we might be faithful to the faithful God. We think of our Lord Jesus riding on that donkey and descending into the city and knowing He was riding into a tomb. Not just His own, but the city. We pray by Your grace, Father, that that day has not yet come for the United States of America, that this is not yet a land of death,

7. According to the parable, what kinds of people are there in the world?

8. What has Jesus asked you to do for Him?