

ST. CHRISTOPHER'S CHURCH
COBLESKILL, NEW YORK

March 28, 2010 – PASSION / PALM SUNDAY C

The Rev. Nina George Hacker

Sermon: “*A Biblical Recipe for Peace*”*

St. Luke 19:29-40 (Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem)

Psalm 118:19-29 (Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!)

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (Christ’s suffering prophesied)

Philippians 2:5-11 (God has exalted Jesus above everyone in heaven or earth)

Psalm 22:1-11 (A prophetic psalm prefiguring Our Lord’s suffering on the Cross)

St. Luke 22:39 – 23:56 (The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ)

“Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!” the people shout, as Jesus rides into Jerusalem. When did we last hear this clamor in connection with Our Lord? At His birth! In St. Luke 2 (vv. 13-14) the angels’ anthem resounds, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace”

To resounding praise, Jesus enters into Jerusalem, an event recorded in all four Gospels. But unlike John, Luke mentions no “hosannas” or palms. Was it because palm branches and “hosanna”—meaning “save us!”—belonged to nationalistic displays of power? Picture for a moment the film footage you may have seen of those tank-laden May Day parades in Moscow, or the Nazis’ overblown productions, with their three-story-high banners and insignia held aloft like those of Roman legions. St. Luke graphically rejects the view of Jesus as a political or military “king,” the kind of ruler that most people in our world look to for powerful leadership.

Jesus Himself has already made a statement about what kind of king He is, by riding into the city on a donkey. In that culture, a donkey was the mount of a ruler entering a town in peace, whereas a conqueror would enter on a horse or in a chariot. At Jesus’ first coming—from His birth right through this procession into Jerusalem—Jesus did come in peace, as a suffering servant, not a militant conqueror. Those who wanted to see a super-hero who would take on the entire Roman Empire would be greatly disappointed.

No, it is not until Christ’s second coming, that Jesus will enter Jerusalem as Conqueror. Revelation 19 (vv.11 ff) foretells: “Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems . . . and His name is called the Word of God. And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following Him on white horses. ... [and] On His robe ... He has a name inscribed, ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lords.’”

For those who failed to accept the Jesus who came in peace, that Palm Sunday was the beginning of their end. In the passage that follows today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus prophesies the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and with it, the people’s way of life, which would take place in AD 70. Jesus tells the crowd, “You did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.” “If only you had recognized the things that make for peace,” He mourns. Because they have not done so, says Jesus, “the days will come upon you, when your enemies ... will surround you ... They will crush you to the ground ... and they will not leave ... one stone upon the other” (v.44).

That fickle Palm Sunday crowd failed to “recognize the things that make for peace.” But what is **peace**? In the last century, there were more wars than in all of previous history. Living in such a strife-ridden world, do we have any sense of true peace? The dictionary defines peace as “freedom from war; from public disturbance or disorder; public security, law and order; freedom from disagreement or quarrels; harmony; concord; an undisturbed state of mind; the absence of mental conflict; serenity; calm; quiet; tranquility; reconciliation; an end to hostilities.” Clearly, we NEED peace!

So what does the Bible have to say about peace? Ephesians 2:14 states plainly that “Christ is our peace.” And in John 16:33, Jesus tells us, “In me you may have peace.” Have you noticed that whenever Jesus came and went, He always conferred *peace* upon those whom He loved? In John 14:27, even as Jesus is going to His death, He says to His friends, “Peace, I leave with you, my peace I give you.” And in John 20:19, when the risen Christ suddenly appears in their midst, Our Lord greets His disciples: “Peace be with you.”

In Romans, St. Paul describes The Lord as “The God of Peace.” This is not the Greek god Zeus, the god of War. This is the God of the Bible, the God of Peace. Yet He will not hold His peace forever.

The first time Jesus came to earth, He came in peace. At His birth, the angels proclaimed, “Peace on earth, to those with whom God is well pleased.” Yet the people did not accept the peace Jesus came to bring. They did not recognize His servant leadership. As a result, there was no peace on earth. And now, the crowd unwittingly shifts the focus, calling out, “peace in heaven”—little knowing that the One who IS their peace will soon ascend to heaven.

I think we all agree—we need peace. We need peace for our bodies—good, sufficient sleep, and relief from stress. We need peace in our families; on the job; at school; among neighbors; in our community; in the world. Even so, world history and our personal lives have shown us that peace is not always attainable through our human efforts. But how can we get it—and keep it?

Over and over, the Bible tells us that real peace is knowing Jesus Christ, having a personal relationship with Him, allowing Him to be king—not of the world, but of our hearts and lives. Do we forget that “Prince of Peace” is one of Jesus’ many names? He is not the Hindu god, Shiva, the god of destruction. This is Jesus, who loves us so much that He gave His life for us.

And because of that unconditional, eternal love, only Christ can bring to our hearts the peace that surpasses human understanding. It is He who confers that surprising calm, that deep-breathing of “it’s going to be all right,” when nothing and no one else can. And Jesus is the only One who can repair relationships that seem impossible to fix.

Second Thessalonians 3:16 promises: “The Lord of peace will give you peace at all times.” Not sometimes. Not, only when we have pleased Him or been good—but at ALL times. So how can we have that perfect peace which Christ longs to give us? Philippians 4:4-7 has what I call the Bible’s recipe for peace. Here, we read:

“**Rejoice** in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your **gentleness** be known to everyone. The Lord is near. **Do not worry** about anything, but in everything by **prayer** and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

So let's review:

First, **rejoice** or be glad in, the Lord always. If you can't think of at least one thing for which to thank God each and every day, I challenge you to take your pulse and see if you are actually alive.

Second, **be gentle** toward everyone. Remember, sugar catches more flies than vinegar. And it takes far fewer muscles to smile than it does to frown.

Third, "**Don't worry** about anything." Notice, right before this advice is, "the Lord is near." Do we really believe God is closer than our next heartbeat? And if we were truly confident of His sweet nearness, wouldn't we be less anxious and worry less?

Fourth, **pray and be thankful**, rather than fret and complain. I know, that's not always so easy. Hey, why pray when you can worry?! Next time you're tempted to worry—which is actually a form of fear—try moving that anxiety over into prayer, and, as Scripture urges, make your requests known to God. He is listening!

It's been said that the greatest weapon in the world is prayer. And I know that many of you can testify to how awesomely God has answered your prayers. Holy Week offers us golden opportunities to pray together as a community. On Maundy Thursday, we will watch with Christ for an hour in the Garden of Repose; on Good Friday, we will pour out our prayers before His Cross; and on Holy Saturday, our prayers will ascend in response to the great story of Salvation as it is told in Scripture and song.

Listen to God's promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14 (ff.): "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven ... Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For I have chosen and consecrated this house so that my name may be there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time." Do you hear that? God is saying, "my ears will be attentive to the prayer that is made at St. Christopher's . . ."

I don't know about you, but I'm disappointed in the way I observed Lent. I don't feel I did enough fasting, charitable giving, Bible study, or prayer. So, we can spend the last days of Lent regretting our spiritual weaknesses—or we can remember that Our Lord has prayed for us, that He has shown us the way to go forward, and that God's Word gives us the recipe for the peace Jesus came to bring:

Remember the four ingredients?

- **Rejoice**
- **Be Gentle**
- **Don't Worry**
- **Pray and be thankful.**

How precious is the peace of Christ! And how unfortunate it was, that the Palm Sunday crowd so long ago failed to recognize this gift that is ours, so freely given. May we receive Christ's peace in our spirits and experience it in our lives from this moment on, and every day, so with all our heart we may rejoice and say, *Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*

* Adapted from a sermon by Nina George Hacker, 8 April 2001.