

Sermon: April 5, 2009 Palm Sunday and Communion  
Scripture: John 12:12-16; Zechariah 9:9-10, Psalm 118:1-2,19-29  
Title: "Understanding in Hindsight"

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Have you ever noticed how things happen to us that we do not understand; how things transpire that don't make sense, or seem out of place, or don't fit the rest of the pattern of our lives. And we are left with the mind boggling feelings that something is out of joint. We may even get the sensation that what is happening isn't real. Perhaps it is a dream. That we are going to wake up and things will be back to normal and everything will make sense.

In 1902 a boy child was born into the Marshall family of Coatbridge, Scotland. They named him Peter. His father worked in the mines and it was expected that when he reached the age of 16 young Peter would go down in the mines and work side by side with his father, as had been done for many generations. But before he reached the age of 16 something happened to Peter Marshall. He began to feel as if God was calling him to become a Presbyterian Minister. It did not make sense to his father, who could barely earn enough money to house and feed his family. There was no money for school beyond what the village of Coatbridge offered, and certainly none for the University. Still, this urging grew within Peter. He excelled in his studies and was admitted to the upper level and received a scholarship. But College was beyond his family's means. At age 24 he sailed for New York City with the hope that life would be better in America. Six years later he had

graduated from Columbia Seminary in Decatur, GA. He had completed his training to become a Presbyterian Minister. He could never explain how it all happened. He really wasn't quite sure how the tuition got paid. And when he met a young co-ed from Agnes Scott College and fell in love, he had a hard time believing that it could be true. Together Catherine and Peter Marshall influenced the generation of Presbyterians that fought World War II in a way that few other pastors have ever done.

Now, the thing that Peter Marshall used to say was, "I do na ken how it happened." I don't know how it all came about.

As you look back on your life, don't you wonder how things worked out the way they did? There are too many happenings that put you in a certain place at a given time and because you were there you met the one you ended up marrying. Or, you just happened to be working for a company when an opportunity for another job arose and you took it and moved to Altavista, and because of that move you became involved in this Church. And you sit back and wonder. "How in the world did it all come together like this."

I know I have often looked back on my life and stood amazed at how God moved me from one situation to another.

You see, at first, we are like those disciples. We simply do not understand. They had been following this itinerant

rabbi for three years or more. They had witnessed some rather miraculous healings. They had participated in the feeding of the 5000. They had wandered with him on the other side of Jordan. They had listened as he had debated with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They had heard his prediction of impending death.

But when Jesus sat upon the back of a young donkey and rode into Jerusalem on the first day of the Feast of Passover, they simply could not comprehend. On the one hand, Jesus had been preparing them for his demise. They had rebelled against any thought of his death. Peter, especially, had chastised Jesus for talking that way. And now, Jesus enters Jerusalem amid the loud Hosannas of the mobs.

During Passover, Jerusalem's population would swell to twice its normal size. Thousands had come for the Passover celebration. It was the place to be. The streets which were narrow to begin with, were crammed with onlookers. Every time some celebrity entered one of the four main gates, a chorus would rise up among the onlookers: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!

Now, I know we want to believe that this reception was unique to Jesus. But it was not!

The Mayor of Sidon would come to Jerusalem for Passover, and as he entered the gates of Jerusalem on his mighty horse, surrounded by servants and minions and followed by stretcher carriers bearing his wives, the crowd

would sing the familiar song. Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel!

The Head Rabbi from the Syagogue in Joppa would arrive at the gates of Jerusalem all bedecked in his fancy robes with their tassels and his phylacteriy on his head with several of his students leading the way carrying the Holy Scrolls and the crowds would sing out: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel!

Every day for a week, important folks would arrive at the gates of Jerusalem to be welcomed by the entheuastic crowds. Try to think about it. Put together, Marti Gra, and Time Square on New Years Eve and throw in the glitter of Oscar Night in Hollywood and add a touch of Disney World and that will give you some idea of the Passover Fervor. To the crowds, every arriving dignitary was a potential Messiah. The land of Israel was a powderkeg set to explode when the right person openly declared himself to be the long expected Messiah. And the Roman Legions knew this. They moved an entire regiment from their base in Galilee to Jerusalem to help keep the peace during the Passover.

So Jesus, dressed in a homespun robe with sandals on his feet, and not having had a bath in many days, with no fancy banners leading the way, riding on the back of a humble colt, enters the gate of Jerusalem. And the crowds sing out: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the

Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel! He did not look like a visiting dignitary. He did not appear to be an honored Rabbi. He did not emit an aura of royalty. He simply followed the description from the book of Zechariah. He rode into Jerusalem seated on the donkey's colt.

And his disciples did not understand! Not until after the week had come to an end. Not until they had witnessed his rampage in the Temple, overturning the moneychangers and attacking those who turned the Temple into a place of commerce. Not until they had seen him arrested and tried and crucified. Not until they went to the open tomb and found it empty did they come to understand the true meaning of the words which the crowds chanted. Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the King of Israel!

And John simply records that "at first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him."

Isn't that the way? In hindsight we understand why our lives have taken such twists and turns. In hindsight we realize that God was in control. Even though, when everything was going haywire, we questioned God and said: Why? God? What is happening to me Lord? What is going on, God? How can this economic set back be helpful in my life, God? Why is my marriage falling apart, Lord? Why are my kids acting like this, God? Aren't you in control, Lord?

But, in hindsight, we see more clearly. In hindsight we get the full picture. In hindsight we are able to connect the dots which only seemed like bumps in the road when everything seemed out of control. The deeper those disciples got into Passover week, the more out of control they felt. It must have seemed like the end of the world to them. Everything they had counted on was yanked out from under them. Everything they had hoped for was nailed to a cross. The adulation of the crowds turned to jeers and scorn as the resolve of the religious leaders came to fruition. And it was not until Christ was glorified in the Resurrection that the disciples looked back and understood.

Oh yes, now we understand. Our King comes riding on a donkey. Not the fine trappings of a Royal visitor. The humble demeanor of someone who came to offer up his life for the sins of a whole nation.... Indeed for the whole world. And the irony of Palm Sunday is that it teaches us that fame and adulation is fleeting and usually not intended for reasons that have anything to do with God's plan for this world. Palm Sunday is mankind's expression of fickle applause which is soon gone and replaced by mankind's Self-serving inhumanity one toward another.

So, we wave our palms, and we sing our hosannas, knowing that without the Grace of God in our lives, we would end up just like the mob. Shouting Hosanna one moment and calling for Barabbas the next. Thanks be to God for His Grace that keeps us humble. Amen

**GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER**

Welcome

The Lord be with you. *And also with you.*

Announcements

Please see the bulletin for all announcements

Prelude

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arranged by: \*\*\*\*\*

You are invited to pray silently during the prelude.

This prayer is offered for your use.

*Almighty God, you built your church  
upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.  
With Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone.  
Join us together by their teaching,  
So that we may be a holy temple  
In whom your Spirit dwells;*

*Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

Choral Introit \*\*\*\*\*

**TO PRAISE GOD'S NAME**

Call to Worship Psalm 118:19-29 #232

Proclamation of the Entrance into Jerusalem Luke 19:28-40

\*Hymn of Praise Hosanna, Loud Hosanna #89

The Children shall enter waving palm branches and those wishing to  
Make their Two-Cents-a-Meal offering may do so as the children bring the urn down the isle.

Call to Confession: Lay Reader

Prayer of Confession:

God of mercy, you sent Jesus Christ to seek and save the lost. We confess that we have strayed from you and turned aside from your way. We are misled by pride, for we see ourselves pure when we are stained, and great when we are small. We have failed in love, neglected justice, and ignored your truth. Have mercy, O God, and forgive our sin. Return us to paths of righteousness through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Proclamation of Pardon: Lay Reader

Response of The Forgiven: *Gloria Patri* #579

Affirmation of Forgiveness: Forgiveness is ours in Christ Jesus. **Thanks be to God!**

Choral Anthem: \*\*\*\*\*

Passing the Peace: The peace of Christ be with you. **And also with you!**  
Let there be a time of greeting and fellowship as we pass the peace with each other!

**TO HEAR GOD'S WORD**

*All children are requested to join Rev. Button at the front of the sanctuary for a short Message before leaving for Children's Church.*

Children's Message: "Why a donkey?" Rev. Button

Prayer of Illumination

Old Testament Lesson Zechariah 9:9-10

New Testament Lesson John 12:12-16

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Sermon "Understanding in Hindsight"



Postlude

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