

Zion's UCC of Taborton
Palm Sunday, March 25, 2018
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Mark Chapter 15

It has often been said that the Bible isn't a book, it's a library. It has many different types of literature within it. There's myth and legend. There's history and poetry and philosophy. There are murder mysteries and love stories. There are some soap operas that would shame any of the current day-time dramas. There's even quite a bit of theology, much of it wonderful, and some of it, in my opinion, awful. There is even some politics and some psychology for us to ponder.

Let's look at some politics. The story of Jesus entering Jerusalem on the back of a donkey is pure political satire. It parodies and mocks another procession that would have occurred at about the same time as the One depicted in the Gospels.

The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, hated Jerusalem. It was hot, dusty and the capital of a backwater part of the Roman Empire. A tour of duty as Governor in Palestine was something to be endured in hope of a better posting in the near future. Pilate much preferred the recently built city of Caesarea along the coast. Not only was it modern, the sea breezes moderated the temperature.

But, the celebration of the Jewish Passover was one of those times when his presence in Jerusalem was politically necessary, both to remind the unruly population about who was really in charge, and to provide additional troops in case something got out of hand.

So heavy was the Roman yoke, that they kept the Jewish high priest's robes in their possession. In order to perform the Passover rites, Chiapas had to go and ask Pilate to allow him access his regalia. Can you imagine me having to go to Steve McLaughlin and beg to use my stole for Holy Week? Everything was a constant reminder of who had the real power. The Jewish elite chafed under this rule, but knew that to oppose it would lead to worse things, especially the loss of their own wealth. So they put up with it.

The entry of Pilate into Jerusalem was another one of those reminders. It was a dramatic procession. There were trumpets and banners. There were elite units of the Roman Legions with brightly polished armor and the best weapons. People were required to line the streets and shout words of support for the Romans. Flower petals were scattered in front of them. Pilate either rode his favorite horse or rode in a chariot so he could studiously ignore the praise being heaped on him by those he considered rabble.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, a very different procession was going on. Jesus entered the city, not on a charger or a chariot, but on the back of a young donkey. He is proceeded, not

by trumpeters and army units, but by dusty disciples who shouted out hosannas. Flower petals weren't scattered in the street, but palm leaves from the surrounding trees. And, palm leaves, in early Christian symbolism, were a sign of martyrdom.

Everything about the Palm Sunday story is carefully crafted to make a contrast between the power elite of that time and Jesus. We are clearly to understand that Jesus represents a new and very different way of being in the world. Each procession can be thought of as the "shadow side" of the other, an idea developed by the psychologist Carl Jung. Jung said that we all have a shadow side. The shadow is that part of ourselves that we do not willingly reveal to others. Sometimes we do even know that it is there. But, until we recognize it, and are able to face it, we cannot be psychologically healthy. The Palm Sunday procession calls us to understand the radical break with the ways of the world offered by Jesus. He was putting before us the shadow of our very humanity.

Another point where the idea of a Jungian "shadow side" seems present is when Jesus stood before Pilate, and the Governor asked the crowd who they wanted released, and they shouted: "give us Barabbas!".

Barabbas was a revolutionary, Jewish Patriot, or an outlaw, depending on your political viewpoint. Many of the early texts give his full name as Jesus Barabbas. Jesus was a common name at that time. It's the Greek form of Yeshua, or Joshua. Barabbas comes from the words "bar". Which means "son of" and "Abbas", which means "father". So, the two men vying for release are Jesus Bar Joseph and Jesus Bar Abbas. Jesus son of Joseph, and Jesus son of the father.

Once again we are presented with shadow sides. Jesus Bar Abbas represents the traditional messianic tradition. That image is of a great hero like Superman or Captain America, or even Wonder Woman. This hero would toss out the Romans and, to borrow a phrase from our own time, "make Israel great again". He was a tough hombre. Think of Anthony Quinn, who played him in the movie Barabbas. He had been out in the countryside fighting guerrilla battles against the Romans and their Jewish collaborators. He was exactly what the Jewish people were imagining when they thought of a messiah. A man who would defeat the invaders, restore the Davidic kingdom, and make them all rich.

Jesus Bar Joseph, on the other hand, wasn't anything like how they expected a messiah to act. He wouldn't fight, just look at his ragtag group of fishermen, tax collectors and even women. He was entirely too inclusive in who he let into his group. He hadn't fought one battle with the Romans and when he had the perfect opportunity in the garden at Gethsemane, he told his followers to put away their swords. He said no to being king. Said his kingdom was not of this world. The crowd certainly couldn't see him restoring the David's kingdom and making them all prosperous. |

Barabbas will fight for us, they thought; who knows what this other guy will do, so they shouted: "Give us Bar Abbas !" Give us the son of the father.

That same tension remains with us today. We can either follow the ways of human beings, and make power, greed, anger, revenge, and oppression the means we use to solve the problems of the world. Or, we can break with those human emotions and try something different. A new way of life. The question I leave with you this week is: There are two processions wending their way through the streets of Jerusalem. Which one will you join?