

PRAYER AT PALM SUNDAY
Series: "Christ in the School of Prayer"
Luke 19: 28-48 March 20, 2016
The Church of the Covenant

When a NASA rocket is reentering the atmosphere, ready to touch down safely back onto the earth, there is a window of opportunity that is open for a moment, and then it closes: there is a perfect trajectory that will allow reentry and then it is gone; there is a moment in time for entry and then the moment is gone. If it misses that open window of opportunity by even a moment it will be burned up in the atmosphere. It opens for a time and then it closes. It is here and it is gone. Palm Sunday was just such an open moment of spiritual opportunity in relation to Jesus. The Messiah had come. Did the people full well understand the moment in which they dwelt????????

The propitious moment in time had come. The Messiah had come to Jerusalem at Passover. The Passover Lamb had arrived. In fulfillment of the prophecies from the Old Testament the Messiah came riding a donkey. The Son of God had come to reclaim the temple for His Father in heaven. He had come to reclaim His people with His precious blood. What a moment! What an extraordinary moment in time it was! What a powerful open window of spiritual opportunity it was! But the window OPEN on Palm Sunday would be CLOSED by an afternoon on a day called Good Friday...It opened for a time and then it closed...The moment arrives and then it is gone...Christ has come in power in this moment. Will we seize that moment? Or will we let it slip away?

It is estimated that some two million people were in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, all pilgrims arrived in the Holy City to celebrate the Jewish Passover. It is estimated that perhaps 25,000 people participated in Christ's triumphal march to reclaim the temple for His Father. Not even 2% of the people who had come to Jerusalem participated in the triumph of Palm Sunday. 98% of the people missed the moment. 2% of the people actually showed up for the most momentous moment ever to come to face of this planet. 98% of the people were too busy; 98% of the people were tired; 98% of the people were focused on other matters and believed the excuses they told themselves in their own minds. 98% of the people missed the moment, missed Palm Sunday. Will we be too busy this week to have a personal encounter with the Christ who arrives this week in power? Will we come up with some excuse to avoid Maundy Thursday and the cross of Good Friday? Will Easter Dinner at home be more important to me than celebrating the resurrection of Jesus? The moment comes and the moment is here and the moment is gone. Will Jesus ride into our life spiritually and in power this week or not?

Some Pharisees rebuke Jesus and tell Him to tell His disciples to shut up. Jesus responds, *"I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones themselves would cry out."* (Luke 19: 40) Jesus is saying, O disciples, either we understand the moment we are in, we understand the presence of the Lord riding into our midst, or if we don't, Jesus can raise up from these stones people who will praise Him. The people of God in Jesus' day did not recognize Him as Messiah and so from these stones He raised up the Gentiles to give Him perfect praise. Seize the moment, realize the time, understand the moment of spiritual opportunity or Jesus will find people who do and will. 2% "got it". 98% missed it. Do we understand the moment in which we find ourselves?

One of two times that Jesus weeps, is over the death of His friend Lazarus. The other time is on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He sees the people who should be faithful, who should "get it", who should understand who He is and the moment in which they are, but who are utterly clueless, who have no concept of the moment in which they dwell. He knows how they have killed the

prophets before HIM. He hears the lies and the gossip of the Pharisees. The very people who should know, the learned priests and Pharisees, are the very people who seek His death. He looks out over the city of Jerusalem, the Holy City, filled to overflow with the people of God, He sees the temple and the Holy of Holies, but all He can think of is His deep sadness and His sense of loss. They do not get it; they do not understand. The moment has come. The Messiah has come. But in five short days that window of opportunity will close. As HE drew near, He saw the city *“and wept over it”*. (Luke 19: 41) On His day of triumph –“Jesus wept”. If Jesus came to Washington, PA I think He would weep over it, too...Too many VAPE shops and Tattoo parlors. Too many heroin overdoses. Too many people worshipping their addictions. Too many empty churches. Too many sheep without a Good Shepherd. Too many people going to hell in an Easter Hand Basket. 98% percent of people missed it in Jesus’ day. How many miss it today???? Jesus summarizes all of Palm Sunday when choking back His tears He cries out –“*You did not know the time of your visitation.*” (Luke 19: 44) You did not know the Messiah was here on Palm Sunday and would be gone by Good Friday. You did not understand that this was your moment and then the moment passed and was gone forever...

A while back it was my day off and I was running errands like a one armed paper-hanger. I was tired and it had been a very busy week in church world. Too many things demanding too much attention. And I happened to be in relatively close proximity to a facility where a member of our church, a dear friend, was under care. And I had one of those nudges, I believe God is always trying to get through to us, always seeking to nudge our heart with the Holy Spirit, always seeking to speak into our heart and mind, to do something, to take some action, to respond to His Spirit. And this nudging was trying to nudge me to go visit this person. “But, Lord, I’m tired. This is my day off. I will come at a later time. I will visit in a bit.” You know, all those things we say to ourselves to put off doing something we know we should do. And, of course, you know the end of my sad story. Of course, the person passed away before I was able to visit again. The time came and the time went. The opportunity to go see my friend elapsed. God was trying to prompt me, but I chose to be part of the 98% who stop their ears and their hearts and their souls to what God is doing...and chose something else. I have thought many times over that lost opportunity since. And every time it fills me with regret. And I understand why Jesus wept over Jerusalem. I understand the incredible sadness of missed spiritual opportunities in life.

So Jesus shows up in the temple in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It is His destination on Palm Sunday. The Son of God rides into the middle of the temple of God in order to reclaim the city of God and the people of God...for God. That’s the moment, the moment of His visitation. That’s Palm Sunday. And Jesus cleanses the Temple, He turns over the money changers’ tables, and He declares a very interesting thing, He shouts out a prophecy from the Old Testament. He shouts out as He is cleansing the Temple: *“My house is a house of prayer. But you have turned it into a den of thieves.”* (Luke 19: 46) “I expected to find a lot of prayer in this Temple, but I discovered anything but. You weren’t spiritually focused in prayer. You weren’t praying to me, even in my temple. This is supposed to be a house of prayer. But you have robbed it of its spiritual power, you have made it into a den of thieves that have robbed it of the Holy Spirit.” May I say, the very reason why the people in that day missed the Messiah and missed the open window of spiritual opportunity and missed the time of their visitation...was precisely because they were not a people of prayer. They missed Jesus because they weren’t praying. Prayer tunes our heart to the Spirit’s work. Prayer at Palm Sunday. So it is Holy Week. So are you in the 2% who “get it” and understand the moment and the spiritual opportunity in the Messiah’s visitation? Or are you in the 98% who don’t? *Hosanna! Blessed is HE who comes in the name of the Lord!* Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!