

Congregational Church of the Messiah

Lenten Season 2009

PALM SUNDAY

Lessons from the Sea: “Majesty”

Matthew 21:1-11

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“I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by...” *Sea Fever*, John Masefield

Palm Sunday gives us a magnificent star by which to steer our lives. Palm Sunday depicts a humble yet magnificent Messiah in the form of a person coming into the city.

Through this one Person, all people are given the opportunity to relate personally to the infinite Creator of the seas and skies, the world and all that are therein. Surpassing the grandeur of tall ships or the glitter of all the gold in the world is the Light that shines from this single perfect, selfless life. Jesus was willing to be humble that we might be exalted and come into a personal relationship with the ever-loving Creator who exists both within and beyond our comprehension. This one Person did more than any other person who walked on this earth to change the world. Others have merely followed in the footsteps of this one magnificent Person!

The word “majesty” refers to something or someone which/who is grand, stately, magnificent. The sea can be truly magnificent. Its size and scope are undeniably on a grand scale. Although many have tried, the sea’s beauty is beyond capturing in words or music, pictures or paintings. One cannot describe, define or explain the magnitude of the sea.

Words cannot express what one experiences when standing on the shore watching waves whipped by an angry sea rise suddenly to crest 20-30 feet before crashing down in a thunderous roar on the unsuspecting shifting sand and swirling surf below. Have you ever stood with bare feet and felt the shudder of the sand as those monstrous waves fall, then hesitate while the sound dissipates. Beneath the surface, momentum builds, gathers the power to rise again high above one’s head and fall crashing into the churning, foaming, hissing surf while rip tides pull the sand from the land back to the base of the wave to repeat the powerful cycle endless times.

We know how to relate to the sand and the edge of the sea. We can measure ourselves being larger than many grains of sand and no way close to the size or power of a large wave. We are smaller still when we walk around the bend of a cove or across a sheltered part of the sea slamming itself against the rugged rocks in a relentless dashing of water against hardened land.

Even a creative, well-educated human mind cannot come close to being able to comprehend

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the length and breadth, the depth and the power of the sea in its totality. The sea is so grand even its extent is a mystery and far beyond our imagination.

At times, the sheer beauty of the sea surpasses what we expect and we are amazed as we gaze at its majesty. Its wonder far exceeds our expectations. We stand in awe and wonder at the immensity of the ocean, and realize that this is only one incredibly well balanced and renewable part of God's over-arching plan of creation. We are able to relate to the majesty of the sea largely because it is physical. We can smell, see, taste and touch it.

As the Great Spirit, Creator of the sea, God far surpasses this one creation in majesty. If we cannot fully comprehend even the sea, which is physical as we are, how in the world can we relate to a Spirit or Source of Power or Being, Who is far more magnificent than the sea? How can we accept what we cannot touch or see? Knowing that as human beings we have difficulty believing in something we cannot see or touch, God finally came down to earth in human form of a person to reveal to human beings God's inscrutable and utterly amazing love for all life. Yes, He gives to us a boundless, unselfish love. Through Jesus Christ, God is trying once more to bring people back into right relationship with Himself. God provides this way for us to relate to God, to touch and see His Love in human life. The magnificence and power of the sea are illustrations. We can read and believe the proclamations of the Prophets. We can read the many legalisms of the Law in the Old Testament, but through the Person, Jesus Christ, God's New Covenant comes within every person.

As individual humans, we come to Palm Sunday with different attitudes. Some Christians come with uneasiness. They know what the week holds. They may not want to witness again the pain and suffering, the death of Jesus, but we know that the events of Holy Week are needed to fulfill God's ultimate plan for Jesus' earthly life. We can also greet this festive day with great anticipation of Easter and try to skim the struggle and suffering that happened between Palm Sunday and Easter. There are those who are willing to experience this Grand Entry into the Holy City and are willing also to walk through the whole week with Jesus. They know God's human expression in Jesus Christ will be ridiculed, rejected, tried, convicted, crucified and buried by the very people God had sent His Son to save. What a travesty of justice! What lack of mercy! What flagrant rejection of a good and perfect life by imperfect people who considered themselves righteous and even justified their actions as a protection of the temple and laws of God!

People who have walked through each day of the Holy Week realize at the end that God often can turn bad situations into victories. God shows His majesty to an unbelieving world. First, God had His Son come to Jerusalem. As Jesus drew near to the Holy City, there were crowds of people singing His praises, throwing their garments in the road in homage and literally shouting that Jesus is coming in the Name of the Lord. A Messiah who will save His people from oppression!

Even though He knew what was ahead for him, Jesus accepted their praise. This parade of

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praise was His first and last one in His life. Jesus was on His way to the death as a criminal. Jesus was still able to live in the present, to genuinely enjoy the present moment and soak it in for all it was worth. He had been faithful to His heavenly Father. He had healed the sick. He had preached the Good News of God's Love. He had taught his disciples and others everything He was told to teach them by His Heavenly Father. Jesus had lived the last three years of his life as an example of self-giving love. He had confronted the religious leaders and their hypocritical practice of saying they believed in God and at the same time denying compassion to God's people.

Now the time had come for Jesus to prove that He believed everything He had been teaching and living. The way Jesus was to do this was not by running or turning away from the suffering that was about to come to Him. He would not disappear when things turned nasty. The experience was bitter because the accusations were coming from the very religious authorities whom Jesus had come to change. The religious leaders were swaying the ordinary people, like you and me, to reject Jesus. If the common people had been left on their own, they would have continued to follow Jesus.

Majesty does not rest only on the pomp and circumstance of the crowds, gold and silver of the armaments or uniforms of soldiers nor even the size of the entourage accompanying Jesus. God used the scene to teach again the lesson that what is important is not what we see on the outside but the spiritual life of a person on the inside. Grandeur of character, qualities of stateliness are within a person. These characteristics are the essence of a person and have little to do with one's outward appearance or economic place in life.

Riding on a lowly beast of burden rather than a fine horse, God tries to retrain our minds and hearts to consider what is truly important instead of following what looks powerful or popular. On that Festive Day, the disciples had no idea what was ahead for Jesus or for them, so they enjoyed the whole scene just as it was. God was teaching us that there are appropriate times for rejoicing, for celebrating. For Jesus and for us, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is such an occasion.

We have sights and sounds of joy and celebration, but whom do we celebrate? Jesus is the One whom we celebrate for through His faithfulness to God we are able to relate to a God far beyond our human comprehension. We praise Jesus and His Life! He lives within you and me!

Through Jesus we catch glimpses of what God is like. We have the opportunity to walk with God and to talk with God. Through the unique, amazing and magnificent person of Jesus Christ, we come to know God and are aware of God's friendly presence in our lives. Through Jesus' life and teachings, God shows us that God is an amazing Spirit who cares for us. When we let that Spirit of God be the director of our thoughts and our words, our actions and deeds are improved naturally. "Miracle of miracles," our lives may even begin to take on some of the qualities of Jesus' life. Caring about others before oneself and being

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confidently secure in God's responsiveness through prayer are only two of the qualities that God gives us. While we will always be imperfect, our living will take on more meaning because God is working through us to accomplish God's redeeming purpose in the world. One of the key differences between Palm Sunday's celebration and every other celebration in the year is that it comes before—not following—the hardest of times for Jesus. In our own lives, sometimes it is worth celebrating the good we have already accomplished, not waiting until we have completed every thing there is to be done. As we go through life, we need to celebrate the goodness of life and not wait for traditional milestones. This is what Jesus did. We can do likewise in our own way for our time and culture.

We can say we celebrate Easter every Sunday. We carry on the tradition of early Christians and celebrate each Sunday as a mini-celebration of Easter. Easter is not so much about celebrating Jesus' life here on earth, as it is a proclamation of God's faithfulness in raising Jesus from an earthly life to eternal life and thereby claiming the ultimate victory over death in this life.

The majesty of God, echoed by mystery in the sea, is magnified, identified, and then edified through the palms and the Cross of Jesus Christ. We are able to relate to them all and claim the victory of Christ in proportion to our faith in God.

The old hymn simply said it as follows:

“Ride on ride on in majesty!
Hark! all the tribes hosanna cry,
O Savior meek pursue thy road,
With palms and scattered garments strewed.

“Ride on ride on in majesty!
Thy last and fiercest strife is nigh;
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O Christ, thy power and reign.”

(“Ride on, Ride on in Majesty,” words by Henry H. Milman, music by John B. Dykes)

No other time in all of the Christian year is there a week that is designated as Holy Week. In fact, it is so important in the life of early Christians that it first was called the Great Week. Let us walk together these coming days by quietly gathering together Maundy Thursday evening at 7:00 in this Sanctuary to reexperience that Last Supper and those events leading to Christ's trials and Crucifixion. Travel the short distance to St. Jerome's on Good Friday. Then let us gather once more here in this Sanctuary on Sunday next to proclaim that love and joy of Christ our Lord both now and through all eternity. Be a part of Holy Week 2009 and let this Great and Holy Week become a part of you!

Thanks be to God for the star of Christ by which we steer our ship on the sea of life.

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Amen.