

Worship Service Message for Sunday, March 28, 2015

Good Morning,

I would like to begin today's Palm Sunday's Message with a story about a small town in the Czech Republic called Pilsen. What is unique about this small town is that it has never forgot what our World War II troops did for their town. You see each year the town of Pilsen still celebrates the memory of their liberation from the German Nazis by General Patton's 16th Armored Division. In fact if you were in Pilsen during this yearly celebration, you would think that you stepped back in time as you would be witnessing a reenactment of the very day American troops along with their tanks and trucks liberated their town and country. The sight you would see is a huge crowd of people lining the streets for miles and waving American flags as a convoy of American trucks, tanks and troops would parade in front of them. For many of us we have seen this image of our troops marching through European towns and villages from historical photographs in magazines such as Life, Look or Saturday Evening Post. What is remarkable, when we see these pictures, is the look on the faces of the people, waving American flags as our troops march by. A former American Lieutenant by the name Earl Ingram who has attended this festival 18 times remembers that very day when he and his fellow soldiers arrived in Pilsen almost 70 years ago. But what he remembers most is that he "saw the happiest and most grateful people in my life". So now that we have in our minds the image that Lt. Ingram witnessed I would like to take us further back in time to a day in Jerusalem where a similar celebration was taking place. And this celebration is known as the "Triumphal entry of Jesus". Here is what we find in Matthew 21:6-11 describing the event; ***"The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."*** So now that we have a picture in our minds of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem we can compare it to the parade in modern day Pilsen. And what I would like for us to do next is to focus on what it was that both crowds were waving in their hands. In Jerusalem the crowd was waving "tree branches" or palms and in Pilsen the crowd was waving American flags. If I was at a parade and waving an American flag what would others think about what I was expressing or symbolizing in doing so? Would waving an American flag indicate that I was patriotic to my country? Would waving an American flag show my gratitude for what my country has done for me? And would waving an American Flag tell of the America's history of strength in overcoming oppression and bringing freedom and

democracy to so many nations? Well, for the citizens of Pilsen, I believe that they were waving the American flag to show their thankfulness and appreciation for what the American soldiers did for their country. And what was it that the American soldiers did for Pilsen that they were so thankful for? The citizens of Pilsen were thankful for their freedom from Germany's oppression by being liberated when the American soldiers fought and won against the German Army. So here is an interesting question for us to think about, "If the crowds in Pilsen were waving flags to show their appreciation of being liberated from German rule, then why were the crowds in Jerusalem waving Palms at Jesus' procession as He entered the city?" You know, I believe our answer may surprise some of us because the Jerusalem crowds were waving their Palms pretty much for the same reason that the Pilsen crowds waved their flags. But there is a twist between the two events. You see, what was different between the two crowds is that the Pilsen crowd was celebrating for a liberation that had already happened and the Jerusalem crowd was celebrating for a liberation they hoped would happen. Yes, the crowd was welcoming and cheering on Jesus because they thought Jesus was going to rescue them from Roman oppression and re-establish an independent Jerusalem nation. So, how do we know that the crowd expected Jesus to be this military king or heroic warrior-messiah that would bring their freedom back to them? Well, there are actually two clues that symbolically tell us that this was the case. The first clue we find is that the crowds were laying their cloaks on the road before Jesus as He rode into the city. And the second clue was that the crowds were waving palm branches as Jesus rode by. To explain our first clue we just need to understand that the laying of cloaks before someone was reserved only for royalty. And the crowds thought of Jesus as their royal King. Our second clue about the crowds waving palm branches indicates to us that the crowds were sending a strong message to the Romans because by waving Palms branches they were actually fanning the fires of Jewish nationalism. You see the waving of palm branches represented a historical tribute to the Macabbean Revolt where Judah Macabee triumphed over the Greek Nation and returned a Jewish ruled Kingdom back to the Jews. So, for the crowds to wave palm branches it was the same as them waving Jewish Flags? Now, let's take a look at what's happening from a Roman perspective. What the Roman's are witnessing is Jesus riding inside the walls of Jerusalem being hailed as a Heroic Messiah that is going to lead a revolt to overcome their occupation under Roman rule. And to make matters worse the crowds were chanting "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel. Something for us to note about the word "Hosanna" is that the word translates from Hebrew with a meaning of "save now". So let's imagine that we are standing in this crowd waving palm branches, shouting "Save us now" and calling Jesus a King. It would be easy for us to conclude that we expect Jesus to somehow defeat the Roman military. But is Jesus really this kind of Savior? We know our answer, don't we? Jesus was not a heroic warrior-messiah but a gentle messiah that was humbly riding a donkey and

bringing salvation to the people of Jerusalem. So it appears that the crowds had it all wrong and their expectations of Jesus toppling the Roman occupation is not going to happen the way they expected. So if I was a reporter standing in the crowd and interviewing someone, I would probably ask them the four "W's". "Who is Jesus?" "What is He going to do?" "When is He going to do it?" And "Where is he going to do it?". You know what is most interesting about my questions way back then is that they are very relevant in our lives today. Here are the four "W's" as we might ask them today in our lives. "Who is Jesus in our lives?" What do we expect Jesus to do in our lives? When do you feel Jesus is in our lives? And where do we feel Jesus in our lives? Of these four questions I would like for us to concentrate on the second question, "What do we expect Jesus to do in our lives? You know this is a very important question for us to think about this morning. We need to think about this question because we may be just like the crowds back in Jerusalem and have some expectations about Jesus that may or may not turn out the way we think they should. To begin with we know that having expectations are very powerful and we tend to rely a great deal on them. I'm sure for some of us, if not all of us that we have had expectations of someone or something that did not turn out the way we thought they would. You see, I didn't expect to be called as a Methodist minister and I know for sure that Jan never, ever, expected that she would become a preacher's wife. So with these two examples of having expectations turn out different than we thought they would, ask yourselves if you have had any expectations that did not turn out how you thought they would. As we approach Easter this year it is difficult for some to bear the thought of Jesus being crucified and dying. But there is one person who happened to be one of Jesus' disciples that had more than just a difficult time with Jesus' death. This disciple had a big time melt down when Jesus died on that cross. Would anyone care to guess which disciple I am talking about? If you said or thought about Peter you were right. So in Peter's life what led up to his melt down? Well if we look back into Peter's journey with Jesus we might say that it was the pressure of some of his expectations that contributed most to his meltdown. From the start when Jesus first met and called Peter we find that Peter's expectation of being a fisherman who catches fish was changed by Jesus when He told Peter that he was going to be fishers of men instead of fish. Next, we find that Peter who expected his name to remain Peter, suddenly found that his name was to be Simon. Jesus changed his name to Simon to reflect that Peter was going to be the rock that Jesus would build His church on. Then there is the expectation for Peter to step out of the boat and walk on water. Or how about the expectation that Peter held that Jesus was not going to wash his feet. And then there was the expectation that He could change Jesus' mind to no longer speak of His upcoming death. But Peter also held on to the expectation that he would be faithful enough and strong enough to admit that he knew Jesus when asked. And we all know about Jesus' prediction in **Matthew 26:34** where Jesus says to Peter, **"I tell you the truth, Peter--this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times**

that you even know me." You see Peter always thought of himself as being a confident and self-assured disciple and that everything he did always turned out well. But when Peter discovered that he did not have enough faith and strength to admit that he knew Jesus he crashed or better yet had the meltdown I referred to earlier. Peter was no longer able to see himself as the rock of the church in fact Peter didn't even consider himself to be a grain of sand. When Peter realized what he had done by his three denials he wept and ran away because he knew what he had become and who he was. Peter, was now a sinner, a sinner in need of forgiveness. But with Jesus' death on the cross, Peter no longer felt that he had anyone who could forgive him of what he had done. Peter was truly alone and sad. His faith was gone and there was no longer any hope in his life. Peter was probably not the only one who lost hope that day when Jesus was crucified and died on that cross. So now let me ask this question again "What do we expect Jesus to do in our lives? Are we like Peter and the others who held onto such high expectations that Jesus would take care of all their earthly needs? As we move into this week before Easter let us keep in mind what it must have been like for Jesus' followers to experience this week in their lives. To go from celebrating Jesus' "Triumphal Entry" with the expectation of Jesus being the heroic-Savior to witnessing His arrest, His trial and His painful death on the cross to no longer having any expectations because in their minds Jesus was dead, truly dead and was no longer with them. And with this great and painful loss in their lives we can see why they no longer had any expectations of hope. But we know a different ending to this story. We know an ending that will bring a newfound hope to all of Jesus' disciples and followers. And it is this ending that we will come to know and celebrate next Sunday. A Sunday that we call Easter. Let us pray,