

SIXTH in Series on COVENANT: "A ROY G BIV LENT" -- INVERSION Mark 11:1-11  
St Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent/Palm Sunday (March 29,) 2015

<sup>1</sup> Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus<sup>al</sup> sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup> and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" <sup>4</sup> And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. <sup>5</sup> And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" <sup>6</sup> And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. <sup>7</sup> And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. <sup>9</sup> And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!<sup>10</sup> Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"

<sup>11</sup> And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Let's review our Lenten Sermon Series based upon the RAINBOW COLORS OF THE COVENANT that God makes with humanity and with all of creation. We began with the Rainbow as sign of the covenant, that God revealed to Noah. And we are following the ROY G BIV of that rainbow. (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet)

**R- Remember.** God remembers our name; how much God loves us; everything but ONE thing, the Bible tells us: God forgets our sins

**O – Open.** God's covenant is open to all kinds of possibilities, so long as we are open to God defining the terms. We don't get to negotiate

**Y – Yoda.** Yoda taught us, when we read of Jesus getting angry in the temple, about getting back to the basics. In understanding what is really important in our faith – it's love, it's relationship. It is NOT sacrifice, in order to appease an angry God.

**G – It's all about Grace.** All that we have is free gift from God. We can't earn it. We can only receive it.

**B – BOUNTY** – can you imagine what it would be like if we realized that we have all that we need, and it is more than enough?

Let us pray.

**(Coming out of the prayer, the organ begins to play "Hail to the Chief" loudly – just barely allowing the preacher's voice to be heard. After the very beginning, it gradually grows softer, ending with just the antiphonal organ in the balcony playing "Hail to the Chief" as a mere echo. At the same time, in the prayer chapel – off the sanctuary and behind closed doors, one tympanum will play a steady beat – "like muffled drums are beating funeral march to the grave"] – for the remainder of sermon, as cued)**

**IT IS A FACT that sometimes the PARADES in our lives don't turn out the way we hope.**

JESUS began his week with a PARADE that MANY PEOPLE WERE ABLE TO SEE. Many people were excited to see Jesus as he traveled in regal, celebratory style down the hill from the Mount of Olives. They cheered and waved palm branches.

Oh, yes! He was **on top of His game then**. But that **parade of victory** would soon turn into a **parade of sorrows**, just five days later.

**It is a fact that sometimes the PARADES in our lives don't turn out the way we hope. ...**

The entry into Jerusalem on a "donkey" or a "colt" (-- It's described as one or the other in each of the four Gospels --) is clearly a sign of greatness, based on Zechariah's prophecy in 9:9 that the savior king of Israel will come mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The donkey was the sign of the Israeli King David (cf. 2 Samuel 16:2) No one then saw it as a sign of lowly or powerless entry.

This change from glorious beginning to sorrowful ending is the stuff of great drama, from Greek tragedy through Shakespearean plays into the stuff of our daily living. We know what it means to be riding high and suddenly have the bottom fall out.

- Anyone who has ever been to an emergency room knows what I'm talking about.
- Anyone who has ever been through a divorce knows what I'm talking about.
- Anyone who has ever lost a job knows what I'm talking about.
- Anyone who has ever lived life knows what I'm talking about.

**This past week I have been remembering events from my life, which intersected with the life of the former senior pastor of this church, the Rev'd Dr. Frank L. Shaffer, Jr. Five other men and I carried his earthly remains to their final resting place yesterday afternoon in Wheeling.**

**One year at Annual Conference, one of our colleagues was riding on top of the world. She was receiving what was perceived as a very plum appointment. She was preaching at Annual Conference. Her countenance was beaming. And Frank went to**

her and said, “Enjoy this moment, but know that it does not last. You are on top of the world right now, but the wheel keeps turning. You will not remain on top of the world. You will fall down. It will hurt. Just remember this. It’s a big wheel, but it keeps on turning. Don’t let go. It will bring you back up.”

She looked at him as though he had two heads on his shoulders and did not know how to respond.

I hope she paid attention to what he told her, for his words did come to pass. No, I did not believe that Frank was a wise prognosticator of the future. I do believe that he was a keen observer of the ways of life and of the ways of God.

The great INVERSION of events of Holy Week are part of the covenant that the prophet Jeremiah foretold – when God’s Way would be written upon human hearts and not upon tablets of stone.

The thing that changed a celebratory crowd to a bloodthirsty crowd later in the week **[here the organ echo dies away]** was NOT the purposeful will of God, **but was the result of human sinfulness and blindness, and most of all: FEAR.**

And what kept our Savior, our Lord, our Friend following that path from celebration to betrayal is the **INVERSION OF FEAR**, and **its name is LOVE.**

**Love casts out fear.** (1 John 4:18)

And this continues today, as well as then.

- FEAR – oh, how it turns upside down the Gospel
- FEAR – that places faith in guns
- FEAR – that places faith in human resources alone
- FEAR – that places faith in self-reliance

But all our schemes and plans and formulae for success will eventually let us down ... and the FEAR will be standing there facing us all alone.

All alone, that is, unless ... unless, we have something else.

***And like muffled drumbeats to the grave***, all our plans are INVERTED.

And it comes to this:

**Fear and sinfulness – not a bloodthirsty god seeking sacrificial appeasement – turned a coronation parade into the Via Dolorosa (the way of suffering.)**

**But it was LOVE that made Jesus take that road.**

The goal was not to die on a cross. The goal was to show how much we are loved and to show what Kingdom living is all about.

It was LOVE then. It is LOVE now.

It was the way of God's Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed in that first sermon in his hometown of Nazareth:

- Good news for the poor
- Release for captives
- Recovery of sight for the blind
- Release of the Oppressed
- Healing, Empowerment, Reconciliation

It was the message THEN. It is the message NOW.

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
 Life is but an empty dream!  
 For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
 And things are not what they seem.  
     Life is real! Life is earnest!  
     And the grave is not its goal;  
     Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
     Was not spoken of the soul.  
 Art is long, and Time is fleeting,  
 And our hearts, though stout and brave,  
 Still, like muffled drums, are beating  
 Funeral marches to the grave.

We long for “Hail to the Chief.” And we long for success. But the way of the Kingdom of Heaven does not depend upon the way of mongering fear.

Not THEN. Not NOW.

But the drums keep beating ... until **[drumbeat STOPS]**

... until we accept the way of Jesus.

... who, for Love withstood the cross

- to show us the way
- to overcome death
- to overcome fear.

When all of our self-made glory lets us down, and we hear the drums of despair beating ...

Know that Jesus went before you then, and he still goes before you now.

**Romans 8:31** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God INVERTS all our “failsafe ways” that eventually fail and let us down.

God inverts all our FEARS.

All for LOVE. All for LOVE. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.