

## **WELCOME 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020 – Palm Sunday '20 A**

### **SEISMIC SHIFTS: POWER MOVES**

Matthew 21:1-16

Good morning & Welcome to Living Water Fellowship! Welcome to this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in the new liturgical season...The Season of Quarantine. There's all sorts of new liturgical rules for this season...most of 'em have to do with keeping your distance & washing your hands! We'll figure it out as we go!

Seriously though...Today is Palm Sunday...We celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem a scant week before he would be arrested, tortured, crucified, buried & raised from the grave to defeat death, overthrow hell itself & forgive sin reuniting the human race with God the Father in life, victory, love & joy unending.

One day: Hailed as king. 5 days later: Crucified as a criminal. And we thought the guidelines for covid-19 prevention shifted quickly...In the last few weeks there has been a Seismic shift in the landscape of our world. The ground underneath our feet has shifted...shaken...our lives have been rocked & thrown into turmoil...our hearts stirred up. We've been unnerved...

And every one of those words I just used to describe us...is how Matthew describes the city of Jerusalem when Jesus rides in: *The entire city of Jerusalem was in an UPROAR as Jesus entered. "Who is this?" they asked.*

Who/What is this forceful powerful violent tremor that hits as Jesus arrives?

It's a Seismic shift as those who wield power discover the limit & end to all earthly power before the redeeming power of the Father in the life of Jesus the Son. This redeeming Kingdom power moves to reclaim/restore a sinful broken dying humanity to offer a new & solid life-giving foundation that nothing can destroy with grace that will forever change you & reverberate in you eternally.

We'll explore & experience that together today as again Jesus comes in the power of his Spirit to plant his love within us & to live through all we are & do.

Let's pray & then we'll get stuck into it!

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

*Lord Jesus Christ, you entered the rebellious city that rejected you & where you were to die for all people. Enter our rebellious hearts, we pray, and subdue them to your will. Crucify our sinful flesh & raise us in your likeness. As your disciples praised your coming and spread garments and branches in your way, make us ready to lay at your feet all that we have and are, that we too may praise your arrival by your word and spirit among us. In your name we pray Lord Jesus... Amen!*

## Palm Sunday '20 A – SEISMIC SHIFTS: POWER MOVES

Matthew 21:1-16

### Faith Chat:

1. If you were going to praise & thank God for one thing today...What would it be?
2. When you think of power...is there a "face" or "name" you attach to it? Who/What?

If you were to try to name *THE PLACE* on earth where power struggles conflict turmoil war violence & killing has raged for millennia...you could easily pick Jerusalem. Its history is written in the language of power – power struggles - power grabs – power plays – power overthrown - violence turmoil wars bloodshed killing self-interest & exaltation...even Jesus describes it as he approached the fatal city lamenting & weeping over the city calling it *"the city that stones the prophets & kills those sent to you ...if only you had known what made for peace but you would not."* (amalgam of Mt 23:37-39 & Lk 19:41-44)

But you & I both know...Jerusalem is just one place on a planet of what...7 billion places where power & its children control domination self-exaltation & the others daily raise their banner. 7 billion? Yep...the most tumultuous power-mad-driven place on earth is not over there...it's in here. The human heart. Ever since Adam & Eve hid from God in the garden & hid from each other behind leaf garments; the human heart has been *THE PLACE* where tumult turmoil the will to power will to control dominate self-centeredness reign supreme...It's in the fear & uncertainty of our future, the loss of financial security, the blaming of this leader or that decision...it wasn't Jerusalem that bought out the toilet paper flour hand sanitizer...it was one of these...that decided "my needs" outweigh yours...

When you think of power...is there a "face" or "name" you attach to it? Sometimes it's me...when I approach life closed, afraid, or defensive...when I think I have to be strong & successful...when I tell myself the life of Living Water or my family is *on me* ...when I divide the world into us/them...when I calculate, quantify, rationalize, or justify...when I sharpen my edges & get hard against what *might* happen...when I take things too seriously/too personally & try to become overly self-sufficient...when I need to be right, prove myself, & have the last word. I/me/mine become the center of my world & this heart is the place where power & control & turmoil & self-exaltation erupt.

As Jesus rides into Jerusalem, there are at least 3 dominant forms of power on display...We see them in our world...you'll recognize them immediately. 1<sup>st</sup> – Power of the State... the Power of force/might/weapons/violence Roman Empire is the super power of Jesus' day. It dominates the known world from Spain to Eastern Asia & into Africa. As Jesus rides into Jerusalem from the East...down the slopes of the Mt of Olives. 20-30K Roman soldiers are at the same time marching in from the West...from Caesarea. It's Passover. There are maybe 300K people in Jerusalem...5-6X usual population. There are travelers, merchants, worshippers, criminals, curious, & bystanders...like any festival mob. The Romans want to make sure there's no trouble. So Pilate summons more troops to ensure this mob gets the message: "We rule here. We are in charge here. We are the Empire, the Reich of a thousand years. Do as you are told...or else." This is the kingdom of this world power...Power of the State...the Power of force/might/weapons/violence. This parade was meant to instill fear & obedience into the Jerusalem population...to ensure no riots no revolutions no assassinations keep the inmates in the asylum & keep the asylum quiet.

But the Romans are by no means the only ones who have that sort of power in mind...Every "Hosanna," every "Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord" reveals the singing, shouting, palm-waving, cloak-throwing multitude is bursting to experience that same kind of power. How do I know that?

2 Scriptures: Ps 118:25-26 - *Please, Lord, please save us. Please, Lord, please give us success. Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord.* AND Zech 9:9-10 - *Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous & victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey: riding on a donkey's colt.* The multitudes are singing/dancing to the chorus of Ps 118 In their mind they see Zech 9 playing out right before them. Why does that matter?

Ps 118 is not a Colin Buchanan kids' song. It is rife with violent military language & imagery...triumphant brutal military imagery. Ps 118 reverberates with God's vengeance against the enemies of Israel...thunders God's justice against tyrants who oppress his people. Vs 14 *The Lord is my strength & my song; he has given me victory.* Those words were first sung by God's people on the freedom side of the Red Sea as Pharaoh's dead soldiers float/bob on the waves that God flooded over them. *I will sing unto the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously – horse & rider hurled into the sea* This is a freedom song – a revolutionary tune. In their minds this is when the boot gets put to the Romans...when they get to rise up & reclaim David's dynasty. When they get to be the powerful. When they get to be the mighty. When they get to exercise violence & vengeance...to step on instead of being stepped on.

And Zech 9: a prophecy of doom/destruction against those who have troubled Israel A promise that God himself will guard, protect & defend those who cling to him & destroy those who won't.. And to top it off Jesus is coming in from the east – from the Mt of Olives. He's coming from where the Messiah was supposed to come... Over the Mt of Olives like

the rising sun bringing God's light/salvation to God's people. In their minds this is when the boot gets put to the Romans...when they get to rise up & reclaim David's dynasty. When they get to be the powerful...the mighty. When they get to exercise violence/vengeance...to wield the Power of the State/force/might/weapons/violence. Throughout human history oppressor & oppressed want the same thing: to be on top.

But there's a 2<sup>nd</sup> Power on display...You can see it in the Religious Leaders' resistance to Jesus & the exultant mob... It's Religious Power...religion is always a coercive power manipulative force. It's the ultimate in political power because religion is about doing this to get that...the art of a deal between the divine & humans so that everybody gets what they want. The Jewish religious hierarchy were not afraid to sacrifice Jesus so that the Romans would leave them in peace. They were happy to cough up taxes to Rome so that they could run their little fiefdom in the Temple. They would willingly kiss the Roman boot on their throats, so they could enjoy relative security & luxury...& they insisted the rest of Jerusalem/Israel comply. Jesus & the rejoicing crowd are a threat to the power they wield because they know the Roman Power will not stand for such an opposition...Jesus & this mob are not part of their political-religious deal, so they try to coerce & manipulate even Jesus into silencing the throng.

Then there's Jesus... Jesus rides into Jerusalem to the shouts/acclaim of the thronging mob...the whole city is in an uproar...but what does Jesus do? Riot? Revolt? Rebellion? Storm Pilate's palace? Begin a media campaign to capture the hearts & minds of the citizenry? Deliver a petition filled with demands & signatures to Herod? Plot an overthrow strategy in secret with his followers? Which was it? Only this...*"Jesus entered the Temple & began to drive out all the people buying & selling animals for sacrifice. He knocked over the tables of the money changers & the chairs of those selling doves."* What?

Jesus did what he always did...No power grab. No power play. Instead, he challenged the powerful & the privileged & the proud so that all could have access to the presence of God. Remember this takes place in the court of the gentiles. That's the only place outsiders could worship or pray or be near God...and the traditional insiders had captured that place for their own ends. So he drove them out. He called them thieves...robbers. He drove them out. Thieves are those whose only interest is themselves...their own wants. So he drove them out.

Jesus rides into town & rejects every form of earthly power & its use...force/might & coercion/manipulation. Jesus lays claim to a kingship that will triumph in a completely different completely unexpected way...Instead of grasping the power & the glory the mob wanted to give him... instead of seizing the accolades as a tidal wave into the place of honour... instead of clinging to his divine privileges...Jesus laid his life fully into the mission of God to redeem the world. He cleared a space so those far from the Father could be drawn in. To fulfill the Father's will...*"he made himself nothing...he humbled himself in obedience to God & died a criminal's death on a cross..."* This redeeming Kingdom power moves to reclaim/restore a sinful broken dying humanity to offer a new & solid life-giving foundation that nothing can destroy.

Jesus comes in the name of the Lord as the prince of peace...Lord of life...healer of wounds...will not snuff a flickering wick or break a bruised reed...raised the dead & blessed children & cleansed lepers & granted dignity to the lowest & the lost & the least...Jesus offers no retaliation upon his arrest & reprimands the disciple who lashes out with the sword. Jesus shows his power not in victory, but in sacrifice. Jesus gives up his life in order to declare what the Lord is doing. Jesus reveals sacrifice, not success, is his calling & his way in this world. Jesus takes on the role of sin offering & sacrifices his own life for the sin of the whole world.

There is nothing about Jesus -- his entry into the city, his confrontation with authority, his brutal & lonely death -- that would inspire anyone. He comes not in power but in weakness, not in might but vulnerability, not in judgment but in mercy, not in vengeance but in love. Nothing about him conforms to the expectations of a world that has come to believe above all things that might makes right or, at the very least, that might wins.

- Because of his trust in God's ultimate plan to win back a sinful humanity Jesus lays down every divine power & every divine privilege & commits himself fully to enduring death for you & for me.
- Because of his trust in God's purpose to destroy death forever Jesus lays down the power of immortality & eternity so we might have life in his name.
- Because of his trust in God's intent to defeat evil once & for all Jesus lays down power, honour & glory to the forces of evil so we may be free from evil's grasp.

It's a Seismic shift as those who wield power discover the limit & end to all earthly power before the redeeming power of the Father in the life of Jesus the Son. This redeeming Kingdom power moves to reclaim/restore a sinful broken dying humanity to offer a new & solid life-giving foundation that nothing can destroy with grace that will forever change you & reverberate in you eternally.

Let's pray: Lord Jesus we live in that place of powerlessness. We can't even leave our homes or befriend our neighbour without fear. Let your strength be perfect in our weakness. Let your sacrifice be our perfect security. Let your death again be life for us and for your world. Through our lives, words and deeds draw to your side all the lost least and lonely, so that your table may be full and the angels rejoice... Amen

**BLESSING/SENDING**

*Blessed is the one who comes to us by the way of love poured out with abandon.*

*Blessed is the one who walks toward us by the way of grace that holds us fast.*

*Blessed is the one who calls us to follow in the way of blessing, in the path of grace, in the road of joy..*

*And may we who are so blessed bless others with his powerful love & the good news of salvation in Him...AMEN*