

Southport Presbyterian Church
March 28, 2010
Rev. June Barrow

And the Lord is Sovereign Still
Luke 19:28-42

Let's begin with prayer: O Lord we are here as worshippers. May we lift you up and exalt you. May we be able to understand something new about you. May our picture of who you are grow before us. May we receive everything you have for us and may we be faithful as we encounter your word today. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Luke 19: ²⁸After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰“Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³²Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”
“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰ “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

⁴¹As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴²and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.

Palm Sunday is a puzzling story. Jesus is welcomed and honored – and yet in just a few days he'll be executed. Jesus is praised and smiled upon by a crowd – and yet in a few days a crowd will call for his death. Jesus is riding the way a king does among his people – yet these people are simple people and children, not throngs of Roman citizens. This man being hailed and hallelujahed will, in just a few days, be condemned and crucified. It's strange and confusing.

The events of Holy Week begin in confusion and misunderstanding. Who could understand this man? In a few days, the disciples would gather in the upper room for a Passover meal, and then Jesus would do that puzzling thing: bend down, with a towel around his waist and a basin of water before him, and wash the feet of his friends. They did not understand; they were confused.

This is the proper week to bring forward all of the things you do not understand. Are there questions, doubts, circumstances, changes, sorrows, or difficulties that don't seem right, fair, that you can't explain, can't fix, and you don't know what to do with them. Do you have things in front of you that do not fit into any simple formula of faith? If so, this is the place to bring them. This holy week is the place to offer them. Because we have a Lord who understands our own lack of understanding.

Today we are going to talk about a love that was so vast that it was incomprehensible and confusing, a love so humble it would kneel, and today we are going to talk about a power so divine, so sovereign, so absolute, that chose to express itself in a way so unresisting that people couldn't recognize it and couldn't understand it.

But as we start, let's remember how this ends... let's remember the cross. We can begin with the answer because the cross is the triumphant answer to two things: It is the triumphant answer to the justice that God's perfection requires. God's justice, which is perfect justice requires that justice be done where there has been sin and that is because God knows what sin is like far better than we do. We spend our lives underestimating it, thinking we can accommodate a little of it, falling in love with some of it and trying to find a way to not let go of it. We find ourselves speaking to God about it and trying to convince him that maybe some of it is all right. But God knows what is good. God knows what is evil. God knows what is sin. And God tells us the truth about it. Don't make a deal with it. Don't want it in your life. Sometimes you have to renounce it vigorously with your will. Remember the first word Jesus said when he began his ministry: Repent. Turn away from that which is going to destroy and harm you. Turn towards that which is holy and right and good and true. The cross answers that question of justice. Because at the cross the perfect justice of God was meted out on someone innocent. One death was enough. The willing death of Jesus paid the price for sin in full. Jesus actually became sin for His people receiving in His own person the wrath of God against them. Justice looked upon that and was satisfied.

But God isn't just the God of justice. He is also the God of love. And there is a requirement that the perfection of love be met too and it was met at the cross. At the cross the perfection of God's love was met in such mercy that God himself would bear the cost of justice. The cross also honored the demands of God's love. Because Jesus suffered in the place of His people, there is no wrath left for those people. Both God's justice and God's grace looked upon the cross of Christ and were satisfied fully.

Justice and love are perfectly met at the cross. Still there were so many confusions. So much people didn't understand.

Let's think today about the perfection of God's plan and purpose, the perfection of God's sovereignty. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the people couldn't figure him out, they

couldn't understand his teaching, they were puzzled by his stories, they tried to discount the miracles—they were confused all the way along because what they saw was incomprehensible to them. When we can't understand it we try to reduce it down to something that fits. Let's think today about the sovereignty and greatness of God. This is the sovereignty that rode as royalty before humble people and children. That knelt down to wash the feet of humble men. That is the sovereignty of our Lord.

Remember the story of Joseph? Joseph said of his hardships: "You intended it for harm, but God intended it for good that many lives might be saved". And we can bring that same scripture into this week, can't we. All kinds of people knew they had power and could do harm to this to this man Jesus whom they could not understand. And a Sovereign Lord said, "Let it be." We can say that those people meant it for harm, but the Lord, the sovereign Lord meant it for good. The Lord had a deeper plan and it was for the saving of many lives.

Do you remember **Romans 8:28**, one of the verses we all love to quote? "**All things work together for good, to those who are called according to his purpose.**" But the next verse **8:29**, says the purpose of that: "**for God foreknew and he predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son.**"

So everything is working for this very great good, and that good is that we might be like Jesus. The good is not a simple thing – that everything will just work out, or that we won't have any stresses, or there won't be sufferings, or we won't run out of money or there won't be difficulties. The good that God is working and has purposed for us: all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purposes. That great good is that we might be made like Jesus, we might be conformed to his likeness. This is God's great purpose.

The early Christians praised God's purpose. In **Acts 4**, the Church had just begun and they talked of this holy week we are just beginning. This is how they prayed: They said that the men responsible for Jesus death, had only done "what your power and will had decided beforehand would happen." From the very beginning, the Church understood that the confusing events of this weekend from the arrest to the crucifixion were known ahead by God, allowed by God, for his own sovereign purposes.

Friends, when our own lives seem out of control, when shifting and shocking circumstances swirl about us, when the ground beneath us moves and nothing seems steady, even then our firm reliance on the sovereignty of God will teach us to say of these situations what Joseph said to his brothers: "**You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.**" **Genesis 50:20**

God was in control in a sovereign and powerful way. God aborted the plans of the devil as well as the intentions of those evil men. The early Christians viewed the crucifixion much like Joseph viewed his problems: "You intended it for evil, but God meant it for my good."

James Stewart, the great Scottish theologian, put it this way: "The very triumphs of his foes he used for their defeat. He compelled their dark achievements to sub serve his ends, not theirs. They nailed him to the tree, not knowing that by that very act they were bringing the world to his

feet. They gave him a cross, not guessing that he would make it a throne.”

So how does Holy Week look if you are struggling, in difficulty, in confusion, in trouble, in pain? Well, here is something from Joni Erickson Tada, who has been a quadriplegic in a wheelchair for four decades. Here’s how it all looks to her:

“The devil’s motive in the crucifixion was to stop God’s Son. God’s motive was to throw open the floodgates of heaven. This has a profound parallel for people with disabilities. The devil’s motive in my disability was to shipwreck my faith by throwing a wheelchair my way. God’s motive was to thwart the devil and use the wheelchair to change me and make me more like Christ through it all. God chose, and Jesus willed, at that moment on the cross, to fulfill the sovereign plan of God and allow the complete purposes of suffering to hold sway. He did not need to prove his divinity, nor compel men to believe, through a miracle. Rather, he allowed the ugliness of man’s sin to keep him there. And that choice to yield to the sovereignty of God has made all the difference for the millions who have believed on him since that day.” (Joni Eareckson Tada, Lausanne Senior Associate for Disabled)

And so as we enter Holy Week, let us affirm that God is the sovereign Lord.

Judas betrays his friend and master Jesus.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

Armed soldiers arrest Jesus.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

The disciples hide and Peter denies that he knows anything about Jesus.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

He stands before the high priest of Israel, silent as a lamb before the slaughter.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

Jesus is declared worthy of condemnation at the religious courts, the government courts and finally at the people’s court.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

Jesus is beaten, mocked, and spit upon.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

A crown of thorns is pressed down upon his head, in a gesture of ridicule.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

Jesus takes that long walk, carrying a cross so heavy that he stumbles on the way.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

Nails are driven into his hands and feet and he hangs on a cross, in public disgrace.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

Jesus forgives his enemies, blesses his mother, and he thirsts.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

At Jesus’ feet, soldiers look around for anything by which they can profit and the only thing of value they can see is Jesus’ robe for which they barter.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

The sky darkens, the earth trembles.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

Jesus cries out, “My God, My God. Why have you forsaken me?” That awful cry.

And the Lord is sovereign still.
Jesus dies, a spear pierces his side, he is laid in a borrowed tomb.

And the Lord is sovereign still.
The disciples wait through a strange Sabbath, a terrifying, stormy Friday evening, a deathly silent Saturday.

And the Lord is sovereign still.

No one, no one—not on earth, not in hell—could know the plans and purposes of God. No one could understand a love so deep, a wisdom so incomprehensible, a grace so overwhelming, a purpose so intent, a power so mighty. Only the Sovereign Lord, Creator of all that is, seen and unseen, the Supreme Intelligence, whose nature and character is love and perfect goodness – only this sovereign Lord could do such a deed, accomplish for us such a victory.

To such a God who loves us in our confusions just as he loved the disciples as they sat through the long silent Saturday full of grief and doubt and questions, you may bring your own life, your own doubts and questions.

Do you not understand the circumstances swirling about you or those you love? Do you not understand the suffering you see? Do you not know what your future holds?
Our lord is the sovereign Lord and to him you may come as you are, to be met with love, mercy, grace and a call to follow hard after him, to renounce the old ways of sin and death, to repent of sins you can name, to ask God for help to live a resurrection life.
Remember that through all the events of Holy Week, all of it so confusing from the plane of earth, all of it was according to plan, according to purpose, none of it an accident. Many actions were done, and over it all, the Lord was, and is sovereign still.

Paul prayed this for the beloved Christians in the church of Ephesus and I pray it for you today:
For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.
Ephesians 3:14-21