

## *I Pledge Allegiance to...*

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church     Luke 19:29-42a

Pastor Bill Chadwick   Palm Sunday April 9, 2017

### **Luke 19:29-42 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

<sup>29</sup> When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup> saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” <sup>32</sup> So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup> They said, “The Lord needs it.” <sup>35</sup> Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup> saying,

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

<sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” <sup>40</sup> He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

<sup>41</sup> As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace (that is, “shalom”)!

Palm Sunday. Actually, only the gospel of John mentions palms. In the other three gospels it is merely cloaks that are spread before Jesus. If it weren't for John, this would be known as “Cloak Sunday.” And Pastor Mary mentioned in the Children's Time that palms don't grow around here. Actually, by the time of Jesus they didn't grow around Jerusalem either. But in the Jewish expectation, the Messiah was to be welcomed with the waving of palm branches, so each year the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for Passover would bring palm branches from home...in case this was the year!

It is into this sort of atmosphere of expectation that Jesus made his entrance into Jerusalem.

<sup>37</sup> *As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen,* <sup>38</sup> *saying,*

*“Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” This is a quote from Psalm 118 (verse 26), one of the coronation psalms, that is, the psalms that were read when a new king of Israel came to power. The exact quote from Psalm 118 is “Blessed is the *ONE* who comes in the name of the Lord!” But Luke makes it *explicit* what’s going on here: “Blessed is the KING who comes in the name of the Lord.”

What is the living word for us on Palm Sunday? What do we do every year on Palm Sunday? We declare that Jesus is the king...of our lives. And we pledge our allegiance to...? Jesus. Before ANY other authority. Amen?

And some people say there should be no political talk in church. Evidently those people have never been to a Palm Sunday service...or read a Bible.

A history lesson. The Presbyterian Church (USA) has ten confessions, confession as in creed, a statement of belief. We begin with the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, moving on through the Westminster Confession, the Confession of 1967 and finally the Brief Statement of Faith at the time of reunion in 1984. Each of these creeds arose out of a time of great upheaval in the church and the world, and they represent the church’s thinking at that time.

The Barmen Declaration arose out of Germany during the time of the Third Reich. As Hitler came to power most of the churches supported him and joined together in what was called the “German Christian” movement. They adopted Nazi ideology and made the church subservient to the state.

But not everyone. Representatives of the small minority who opposed this, who called themselves the “Confessing Church,” gathered together in the city of Barmen, Germany, in May of 1934 to adopt a theological declaration. Primarily written by Karl Barth, it declared essentially that Hitler was not their *fuhrer*, literally “leader.” Jesus was their *fuhrer*, their leader.

My friends, we in the US are in a time similar to that which led to the issuing of the Barmen Declaration. It is time for the faithful followers of Jesus to stand up for the values of Jesus. Amen?

Some standard prologue before I get into the meat of this. Some of you have heard this five or six times, but it's important. At the beginning of the Presbyterian Book of Order, which is our handbook of rules and regulations, there is a caveat, which reads, "God alone is lord of the conscience." I believe that means, among other things, just because the preacher says it, you don't have to agree with it.

Second, the concept of the "separation of church and state" is widely misunderstood. It means the state has to stay out of the church's hair, but NOT the other way around. It does not prohibit the church from attempting to influence the state, other than a church cannot endorse individual candidates.

Third, I am about to be highly critical of the current federal administration. For those of you who are new around here, let me assure you that I am an equal-opportunity critic. Since my ordination almost 40 years ago I have preached sermons critical of every administration over those 40 years, including sermons and newsletter articles highly critical of the Obama Administration—his budgets and his military policy, especially the use of drones.

As most of you have heard me say more than once, "I am not a Democrat; I am not a Republican. I am a member of the Jesus Party."

A budget is a moral document, a theological document. Our spending shows what we worship, as individuals, as a church, as a nation.

On March 16 the administration released its proposed budget. As always, this is just a beginning point, thank heavens. We have opportunity to affect it.

The federal budget proposal contains a 10% increase in military spending. That's a \$54 billion *increase*. There are 189 countries in the world. Well over half of all countries, 111 nations, have a smaller total gross domestic product than that \$54 billion dollar *increase*.

I'm guessing that a lot of people might think that the US spends on the military about the same as Russia or China. No. The US already spends more on military than the next seven countries *combined*: China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the United Kingdom, India, France and Japan *together* do not spend as much on the military as we do. (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2016 Fact Sheet (for 2015) SIPRI Military Expenditure Database). Yet a proposed \$54 billion increase. That increase is twice the total budget of the State Department, charged with keeping us out of wars.

What gets cut under the proposed budget? (Figures from CNN)

The State Department gets cut by 29%.

Health and Human Services cut by 16%, including \$4.2 billion in community services programs like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Department of Education down 13%, eliminating funding for before- and after-school and summer programs. The Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, reserved for college students with the greatest need for financial aid would be eliminated.

The Department of the Interior cut by 12%. The budget would *increase* funding for programs that drill for oil and gas on public lands and cut funding for programs such as the National Wildlife Refuge Fund.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development down by 12%, including eliminating federal funding for Meals on Wheels.

There are many more examples. I've saved the best, rather worst, for last. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is cut by 31%. The budget calls for the elimination of over 20 percent of the department. It would also eliminate all funding for enactment of the Clean Power Plan, the regulations designed to curb greenhouse gas emissions from power plants. It would also discontinue funding for climate change research and international climate change programs.

Erin Anderson Wenz and her family visited China last year. (slide) It's a little hard to see. Let me describe this slide: Son Jack, because of the horrible air pollution, is wearing a bandana over his mouth and nose as he tours the Great Wall. In recent months Erin has been sending this photo to elected officials with the caption, "This is what a country without an EPA looks like."

(slide off)

As Jesus came down the Mount of Olives and looked over the city of Jerusalem ahead of him he wept, saying, "If you, even you, only knew the things that make for shalom." We can well imagine that as Jesus looks over our land today that he weeps. "If you only knew the things that make for shalom."

But his followers DO know the things that make for shalom. May we disciples take up our crosses, show allegiance to our king, and follow him into ways of justice and peace.

One of those who gathered at Barmen to declare his opposition to Hitler was a young pastor named Martin Niemoller. He is best remembered for this quote, which no doubt many of you have heard before.

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a Socialist.*

*Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.*

Martin Niemoller spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps.

If not now, when will the followers of Jesus rise up and make our voices heard?

Every day I do two things: I pray blessing on the President. And I take at least one action. I write a check or sign a petition or make a phone call or demonstrate or send an email on behalf of shalom—justice and peace. Will you join me in that? Maybe not every day, but at least every week?

The Social Justice Committee has contact information for our elected representatives. Will you speak up on behalf of Meals on Wheels recipients? Will you speak on behalf of poor college students? Will you speak on behalf of those who will go cold without home heating assistance? Will you speak up on behalf of God's beautiful Creation? Will you? (Show of hands)

At the door today don't tell me "That was a good sermon." Like every sermon, we don't know if it's good or not until you do something. If you'd like, you can say, "Bill, that was a good start; now I will do my part."

One of our Mission Committee members said the other evening, in a discussion about Meals on Wheels funding, "This is a government without a heart."

We, the followers of Jesus, can be the heart of this country. Let us take up our crosses and march and write and phone and give money and run for office and make this country truly great.

Amen?