

March 20, 2016

Palm Sunday

## **The Power of A King**

Luke 19:29-40

David A. Renwick

### Zechariah 9:9-10

<sup>9</sup>Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

<sup>10</sup>He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

### Psalm 118

<sup>25</sup>*Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! (Hebrew = Hosanna!!)*

*O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!*

<sup>26</sup>*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.*

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### On this Palm Sunday morning

When we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem  
with crowds using the words of the 118<sup>th</sup> Psalm  
to claim him as a king – as their undisputed leader –

I'd like us to think about the importance and power of leadership:

(the power of a king of some sort)

Within life in general and within our own lives in particular

### And I'd like to do so with the help of three stories . . .

- **One of the stories**, of course,  
is the story of the leadership of Jesus  
on Palm Sunday and in the days that followed
- **One of the stories** is the story of  
The kind of leadership I saw in a trade union town  
When I was just starting out in the ministry
- **and One of the stories** – is a story about the
  - the general human need for leadership,
  - and our frequent ambivalence towards it . . .a story that springs from corporate America . . .  
which is where I want to begin . . .

### **I. In fact I want to begin with your shoes . . .**

Some of you have never heard of “ZAPPOS” . . .

But some of you are wearing shoes you actually bought from Zappos – you and 24 million other folks . . .

It's a great company, but it was in the news last year

for something not quite so great . . .

when Harvard Professor Barbara Kellerman,

wrote about Zappos and a movement

called leaderless organizations or holacracies . . .

This is what she wrote. (<http://barbarakellerman.com/being-leaderless/>)

BEING LEADER-LESS has always had a strong appeal.

There is something innately engaging about the idea  
that people might organize themselves

in ways that are non hierarchical, in ways that are totally democratic.

- Imagine! Everyone is the-equal of everyone else.
- Imagine! No single man or woman has more-of-a-say than does any other single man or woman.

[DR: Everyone has the same dignity and respect . . .]

From time immemorial, utopias have been built on the idea of this ideal.

So too have countless social movements.

BUT almost always (says Kellerman) the dream of being leaderless is just that,

– a dream, a fantasy not a reality –  
at least not for any prolonged period of time.

And (to make her point, Kellerman points to Zappos

Two years ago, Zappos' CEO, Tony Hsieh (pronounced "Shay"),  
embraced what's called "Holacracy,"

a system of leadership **in**-which everyone (ostensibly  
at least) has a voice – even an equal voice.

Fast forward, however, to the present and Zappos, she says,  
is anything but a workplace utopia.

Employees complain that without clear leadership

**it's complicated and time-consuming,  
inefficient and uncondusive to innovation.**

And when CEO Hsieh responded to the discontent

by sending a 4,700-word e mail to everyone at the company  
accompanied by an ultimatum – "Holacracy or get out!"

– fully fourteen (14) percent of the workforce  
[took the severance] and up and left!

Of course Hsieh's ultimatum conveys the conundrum that is . . .

for all the talk about Holacracy being non- hierarchical,

at Zappos it was imposed on those below  
[and then re-imposed]

by a CEO [– the leader, the King – ] from on high.

So, Kellerman concludes:

The overwhelming evidence is that human animals, like other animals, prefer having someone . . . at least a little bit in charge.

In other words, we need leaders

– even when we feel ambivalent about them

Or think we'll gain way more freedom when they're not around at all!

**Which leads us to the 2<sup>nd</sup> story –**

Because there are also those who are on

the other side of the coin completely from the 'leaderless' approach:

These are people who have no ambivalence at all: they want a leader,

And they want their leader to look like a leader.

Because as followers their dignity comes

Not by being free to do their own thing

but by being part of the gang, team . . . part of the tribe . . whether their particular leader  
brings them rational, clear cut, measurable benefits or not . . .

**SO HERE'S THE SECOND STORY . . .**

A little biography which has to do with what I learned

about at least one aspect of leadership in my first church

As some of you know . . . I grew up in the city of Edinburgh in Scotland: a white collar, business, civil service and academic city

And I lived in a nice little cocoon,  
In which I had virtually no contact with anyone  
who had not been to or was not going to university.

More than that, I was a math guy  
– who thought (quite reasonably!) that the world ran *on reason*,  
and that people could be persuaded  
to **do** the right thing/**believe** as long as they were given  
good enough and clear enough arguments to do so.

And I carried these ideas with me  
through 8 years of college and seminary  
until I realized that **it was time for a change** . . .

I wanted to see another part of God's world  
And to step out of the shell in which I'd lived in . . .

So I accepted a call to be minister of a very small church  
north-east of Montreal in Canada – 650 miles northeast  
– and dragged my poor wife Currie (from Georgia!) up there for 5 long winters.

The church was in an iron ore mining town,  
and the members of my congregation were generally  
the wives and children of blue collar trade union members

They were wonderful people!

Some were *the first in the family to have finished high school* and then, for the men, *the first to go on to learn a trade* that  
could provide more income for their families  
than their families (mainly from fishing villages in Newfoundland)  
had ever known.

Only one member of the church had been to college.

For both Currie and me, this was a completely different world culturally  
than the world we'd known growing up  
**and a huge part of that cultural difference had to do with**  
the whole business of unions and union contracts:

**Every three years** the contract between the Mine Management and the Union came up for renewal [and this is where  
leadership comes in]

And the history was repeated relentlessly:

- The mine would make an offer
- The union leadership would reject it,
- negotiations would follow
- the mine would resist the union demands
- and the union leadership would urge that all the men go on strike

And they did: every three years.

They knew the rules of solidarity – and they followed their leaders.

And if they became scabs and broke ranks,  
someone would make them pay . . . and then in the end,  
*after 3 months? 6 months? sometimes 9 months?*

a deal would be made, and with the new contract  
the union members (my people) would make some gains . . .

But that's when I did the math – (surely the only rational thing to do)  
and discovered that it was hard to argue that  
the union ever *made up more* in the contract  
than what they lost by not working when they were on strike.

It all seemed so meaningless, and irrational – and hurtful to families (my families), and this was especially the case around 1980,

when the bottom fell out of ***the price of iron ore***,  
and everything in the economy indicated that the mine owners  
weren't playing games, and really didn't have the resources  
to meet union demands – indeed, they were fighting to survive.

***BUT nothing changed with the Union Leadership***

– *They still said “we're going on strike” – and the men followed!!*

And in that moment, so *devoid of reason* – or at least “reason the way I saw it” . . . I began to see as an outsider . . . what *had not been clear* to me, at all, before: that this “every- 3-year” battle between union leaders and mine owners ***was really NOT about money and benefits at all*** – *Or only* partly about money and benefits

Far more, ***It was about*** pride and dignity:

***It was about being*** able to hold your head up high

When your livelihood depended on  
people of privilege like me . . . who controlled the shots  
. . . and held all the cards, and all the power in their hands

***It was about having*** someone champion you when you knew (or felt) that you were *on the bottom* – and not the top

Which was an experience I knew little of . . .

- my parents had sent me to the best high school and university in my nation
- they'd given me a home, and an education, and a dignity  
that NO ONE could take away – *and I took it for granted!*

BUT, precisely because I took it for granted I could not see what I had.

So I could not see, either,

– what my people did not have and wanted desperately . . .

***And so*** it fell to ***the leadership of the union***

to provide them with the dignity that I took for granted . . .

And ***to make a stand*** every three years – to prove that

***They*** were *some-ones* and not *no-ones*

***They*** were ***not*** mere pawns in the system . . .

But had their dignity to keep as well . . .

Which meant that ***any arguing from reason*** – ***any*** doing of the math

to say that *going on strike would win them nothing financially*

was of course – useless—it was beside the point . . .

Because *what they wanted* was *something else* completely:

***Someone strong,***

***Someone on their behalf***

to stand up to the bosses,

to stand in the face of those who controlled their lives

to show them a thing or two:

***to show*** them POWER!!

. . . the power of a Leader . . . and perhaps a King!

### **3. WHICH BRINGS US TO THE THIRD STORY**

– the story about Jesus entering Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday

At a moment in history when many Jewish people

were looking for someone / desperate for someone

who would show this same kind of in-your-face Union-POWER

(*and show it with violence if necessary*) –

to bring down the establishment

the rulers and oppressors –

the Romans and the Religious Aristocracy

the people they blamed for robbing them

of their freedom and dignity . . .

And some of them thought they'd got it with Jesus!

– That they've got that kind of "*In-your-face, Don't step on me*" – leadership with Jesus. Because the little Palm Sunday donkey parade

Down the Mount of Olives

Across the Kidron Valley and up into Jerusalem

Was by no means **as innocent or neutral** as it sometimes appears to be.

Instead it was a deliberate re-enactment of Scripture

– following the words of the prophet Zechariah, who said that

*when Israel's promised warrior king – the Messiah –*

*would arrive to do his work of restoration and judgment*

*He would do so in precisely this way like Jesus: Riding on a donkey.*

**But implies Zechariah in the next verse:**

*Don't be fooled . . . even tho' the King looks so humble,*

*he's actually filled with all the power he needs*

*in order to lead and rule the whole wide world – from sea to sea*

[<sup>10</sup>He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.]

**So there was nothing left to chance in this parade:**

According to the Gospels, (Luke 19: 30-35)

Jesus had clearly prepared for this moment:

And had made sure that a donkey would be ready and available

. . . so the drama of the moment wouldn't be lost:

**It was a Palm Sunday News Event:**

- a dramatic statement by Jesus' about his own status and power!
- a dramatic claim that people recognized . . .

And which caused them to say it out loud . . .

*"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! (Ps.118)*

[the actual Psalm says "blessed is the ONE, but they filled in the blank]

And called him KING – they knew what he was claiming

**They wanted him as a King!**

**They knew he was a King** – at least until a few days later when

the whole charade came crashing down

and Jesus was arrested, and condemned

and beaten and **hung out to die** . . .

With no show of strength . . . or power . . . or leadership at all

- It was as if the Mine Owners had won hands down without a negotiation.
- It was as if the CEO had abdicated all his authority without so much as a parting note (let alone an e-mail) to his employees

**AND YET . . . what history bears witness to, is that from that day to this, SOMETHING REMARKABLE HAS HAPPENED . . .**

More people have followed his lead

And called him king

And found their dignity

– even their eternal destiny –

Under his sovereign rule

Than through anyone else, **ever** . . .

And for one reason – that despite his death,

**the people who knew him began to see**  
*in the days that followed*  
**the full expression of his royal power . . .**

**They came face-to-face in particular,  
with the Power of his Resurrection . . .**

Jesus, tortured to death, rises again!!  
**So that** even though his enemies won at first –  
In the end – within a few days – they had lost!

If you cannot conquer someone by killing them  
If you cannot keep them dead, or down  
*Then no matter how powerful you seem*  
*You are less powerful than they are*

**And on that first Easter Day they saw God’s Power at work in Jesus**  
**and from that powerful moment they began to look backwards**  
*(from the resurrection to the suffering)*

**and began to see God’s power at work**  
Even in the middle *of his suffering, . . . demise, . . . death . . .*  
Even in the middle *of his weakest moments:*

The power of a King

- Not to destroy people but to love them
- Not to toss them out of the crowd for spitting in his face,  
but to forgive them,
- Not to label people but to call them by name
- Not to give them ultimatums but to give them grace/mercy
- Not to let them wander aimlessly though life,  
but to give them a direction & path to follow
- Not to hold on to his own life, but to give it away  
as a sacrifice for their sins!

**In other words, in Jesus at his weakest they saw the power of a true leader . . . the power of a true king.**

So that for them, Palm Sunday was not the end . . . but just a start  
A step on the path to choosing whose rule to live under . . .  
Who would truly lift them up from the bottom to the top . . .

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*“Look! Says Zechariah – Your King comes to you,  
triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey.”*

***Some of you know this leadership . . .***

You’ve given your lives over to him to live them under his gracious rule – and you would have it no other way . . .

***Some of you, you do not know his rule as yet . . .***

Perhaps you’re scared, that King may oppress you with his power if you take him too seriously (But please know – the one who used his power to die for you would never do that: *would never harm you . . .*

***And for some – you knew it once, but his rule begun to slip away . . .***

Your life has become a ‘leaderless organization’ – more complicated than you can handle . . . and it’s time to get back on the Palm Sunday track.

My friends, No matter where the King is in your life . . .

do not let this Palm Sunday go by without joining the parade . . . praying . . . that JESUS THE King would not just be their king,

**but yours**, and mine, today and forever!

Let us Pray: (words from St. Augustine) . . .

*“Grant us so to know you, that we may truly love you,  
and so to love you, that we may fully serve you,  
whom to serve, is perfect freedom,  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

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**THE NATIONAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
4101 Nebraska Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20016  
[www.NationalPres.org](http://www.NationalPres.org) 202.537.0800