April 17, 2011 Lent 6 Palm Sunday John 12-9-19

DECISIONS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

Let me begin with a story. It took three tries to get this sermon done. The other night I was just about asleep thinking about how busy the next two weeks are going to be in our lives. With Karen's wedding, all the company we were going to have, with some here this morning, thinking about sleeping arrangements, food etc, looking to today, Palm Sunday, and of course the final week in Lent with services on Thursday, Friday, and early Sunrise service Sunday. Lots of things were on my mind that night when I was thinking about this Palm Sunday Sermon. What more could be said that I haven't already said? Palm Sunday is always the day we rejoice even though we know at the end of the week it will be sorrowful. So I was thinking about Jesus coming into town on the donkey while people put palms in front of him greeting him with cheers, screams, praising his name, praising God for sending the anointed one and all that. Then I thought of those on the other end of this parade route, those who stood at the gate watching what was going on. I thought how difficult it must have been for those religious leaders who stood there watching this big parade as people flocked to line the streets that led right to this very gate. Then I thought about what was going through Judas' mind that day as well. He perhaps had already thought about turning over Jesus to the leaders if the price was right. He had been skimming a little at a time from their purse and a few times he almost got caught. Once in awhile he thought he could see Jesus looking his way as he took money from the sack to buy bread and other stuff that they needed in their journey. And I thought about how he was angry when an expensive ointment was used by a woman to wipe the feet of Jesus. She used it all. She anointed the Master from head to foot. In his mind this was a waste. They could have sold it, even part of it and fed many for a long time. In fact if they had sold some of it they the disciples would have been set for oh, another few months without

having to scratch for money or depend upon others to feed or give them lodging. But in all honesty, Judas may not have been thinking so much about that, but about how much he was losing because that nice little amount would have been nice to get a hold of.

Well, not all those thought went through my mind, but three characters did. Judas, the religious leaders at the gate and Jesus went through my mind. And out of that came the title to this sermon, DECISIONS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD.

You might be asking about the story. That's not it. Those things I said are part of the sermon….here is the story. I began to write this sermon Tuesday in the office because with all the other things I had to do, Mr. Williamson passed away and I was having his funeral on Thursday, the day I work on the sermon. Plus company was coming Thursday night and Friday, with wedding rehearsal and all the rest. I thought I'd get a jump on it on Tuesday after I finished the bulletin and took care of a few other things. As I was writing the sermon it was going very smooth and the Holy Spirit seemed to be moving my fingers from key to key. I thought this would be a good sermon. I thought the flow was great using stories leading up to Palm Sunday and all that. All of a sudden my message was gone from the screen. I looked and looked for it but could not find it. I have learned to save things and thought I had it saved but when I checked the only thing that was left was the title. No matter how many times I looked, the only thing I found was the title. I searched and searched but no luck. So I thought, like perhaps many of you that was not the message God wanted. Perhaps the Holy Spirit had another idea for me and the message. Since it was already noon Carole and I headed home. When I got there, I had forgotten to put my cord into my bag so I headed once again to the church. I began to think about the sermon once again and strongly felt a sermon for Palm Sunday about the decisions of the three characters was right on. So I picked up my cord, drove home, plugged it in and began sermon two on DECISIONS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD. This time it began a little

differently with the same thought, though instead of beginning at the Mt of Transfiguration, I began in the city of Jerusalem where the travelers had come to celebrate the Passover. This sermon seemed to be going well too. My fingers being guided by the Holy Spirit once again and my mind racing ahead with the things about Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and all that transpired that week. I thought about those who lined the road where Jesus was coming from the city after hearing story after story from those whom Jesus touched. I mentioned the blind man healed by Jesus with a mud ball. I told how he told the story about running to the pool as Jesus told him to do to wash his eyes that were stinging from the grit the dirt had caused. I told how that man washed his face and the next thing he knew he wasn't seeing darkness but light. Then he put more water on his eyes and he could see things moving. It was kind of hazy but he began to realize it wasn't trees he was seeing, but people walking and talking. He splashed more water in his eyes and he could see faces he had never seen before. He recognized the voices of those who gave him a few coins as he begged near the gates, but now he saw their faces. He ran back to where he had met the guy who gave him his sight to thank him. He didn't know what this man looked like, but he knew he would never forget that wonderful voice that brought a soothing to him as he told him what he needed to do in order to get his sight. When he heard the voice, he bowed in front of Jesus, praised him and God for giving him his sight. He told people that story over and over and over. He told how once he was blind, but now he could see. How once he was lost but now he had been found. And when he heard there was a crowd outside the city walls lined up to greet Jesus he told them, "Folks, I know that man. He is the one that gave me my sight. He is truly the Son of God, the Messiah. He has come to give us hope, to tell us more about His Father in heaven. He has come to heal our souls. Come join in welcoming him. Let's join the others." And off they went.

Then there was another person there telling people about the man outside the gates that touched his life too. He was there when Jesus feed the multitude with just a few fish and a couple loaves of bread. He was in the front row when the day had ended and the disciples tried to tell them all to go home before it got to dark to find a place to stay and food to eat. But no one wanted to leave. No one had had the fill of Jesus' teaching. He was offering them hope. He was offering them fresh starts. He was offering them healing. In fact he was offering them himself. Finally, after a bit, and nudging from the disciples, he told them since they had not done what he expected them to do; he would take care of each need. "What do we have?" Jesus asked. "Nothing" one disciple said. "Hey mister, I got a couple of fish and loaves I was taking home for my mom. You can have them," a young man said. Jesus smiled at the young man, took the fish and offered it in thanksgiving to his Father and put them in a basket and gave it to Andrew to start passing out. "But Master, this will only feed the first row if they all just took a small amount." Jesus nudged him to just keep giving from the basket and not worry about it. With a shocked look on his face with each piece of fish he gave out, another replaced it and then another and another. He even gave some to another disciple and another because his basket was getting heavy. They kept going until over 5,000 men and who knows how many women and children were in the crowd that day. No one went hungry and in the end they had 13 baskets of fish left over, one for each disciple and one special one for the young man who had offered all that he had to Jesus. "And folks," the man said, "The same thing happened with the bread. And once again 13 baskets were left over, one for each disciple, and one for the young man who shared from what he had." With that, and many, many other stories, people went out to see the man who did so much with so little, the man who could heal the sick, give sight to the blind, could make the lame walk, drive out leprosy and other demons, who raised the dead and gave hope.

After about two pages the typed the God the Father must have nudged God the Holy Spirit to tell him that wasn't the message he wanted you to hear so once again I lost it, and all I could find was the title on a blank page DECISIONS THAT THANGED THE WORLD. So I began what is not the final draft which I did end up with. So hear the rest of the story about DECISIONS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD.

Back to Palm Sunday and one final story those who didn't know Jesus might have heard. You see some had seen it with their own eyes a few days before and they were amazed. Some who were on the fence wondering who this man really was saw it with their own eyes. They were friends of Mary and Martha and just a few days ago had attended the funeral of their brother Lazarus. He suddenly became sick and died. Mary and Martha knew Jesus for he had eaten many times at their home when he and the disciples were in town. They sent word to him that their brother was near death and would he come as quick as he could and take care of the situation. When Jesus got the word, he didn't rush off much to the amazement of the disciples. They questioned the master and said if they didn't hurry Lazarus would be dead. But Jesus stayed another 4 days before making the journey. Of course when they arrived at Bethany, a crowd had gathered to pay their respects to Mary and Martha and say how wonderful a man he had been and how he would be missed in the community. When Mary and Martha heard that Jesus had arrived they ran to meet him. "Master," they said, "If only you had come sooner our brother would still be alive." Jesus told them not to give up, but lead him to the tomb. Others hearing that Jesus was there, even some of the religious leaders who were friends of Lazarus followed to see what Jesus was going to do. Maybe he would have a final prayer for him after all; when he saw the crowd and heard them wailing tears came to Jesus' eyes. He loved Lazarus. When he got to the tomb, he bowed his head as if in prayer, then looked toward heaven and raising his hands, he paused a moment and then words came from his mouth, words that no one had ever heard before…words that were utterly amazing. Even the religious leader\s

covered their ears hoping what they heard was wrong. But Jesus spoke them again for all to hear…. “Roll away the stone.” “Lord,” one sister said, “It’s been 4 days, and the body has begun to decay.” “Woman, trust me.” “Lazarus, come out of there,” Jesus shouted. And a horrified crowd stood looking at Jesus, looking at the tomb, watched them move the stone in front of the stone, and then in a few moments it was as if a ghost had appeared. “Remove the bandages from Lazarus. He is not dead he is alive.” You talk about scurrying. Mary and Martha and others ran to Lazarus’ side. The religious leaders hightailed it to tell the higher ups what just happened. And Jesus, well, let’s just say he stood and smiled at all that was happening, for even some who just witnessed a miracle, fell to their knees in adoration and praise.

My friend that was the last straw that broke the camel’s back for the religious leader. Their decision was that one man needed to die to save their nation. This man was Jesus, the one who was causing all this commotion. They had tried to deal with him to no avail. He must die. Now was the time. There must be one who would hand him over to them. Offer a handsome reward. That always seems to work. So the word was passed and one of the guards who had heard someone say how one of the disciples, Judas was his name, had been thinking that maybe it was time for he and Jesus to part ways. Maybe, the guard said, he would do it if the price was right. “When they enter the town, find the man and make the deal” the head of the religious leaders said as he walked away from the gate to the city as the noise and cheering for Jesus was getting closer. Truly, the time had come. One decision down, two to go.

Meanwhile, Judas was along the route with Jesus and the others as people paid their homage to him by calling him King and Messiah. While the disciples acted like the guards that protect the president of any country, they marched closer and closer to the city, wondering what was going to happen and how great a crowd had gathered for this great

occasion. Judas may have been one of the last disciples in the parade, lagging behind Jesus and the others. Maybe, just maybe, as they were heading up the way making their way to the gates of the city, someone got Judas' attention. A note was passed that said, "Meet me at the Devil's Inn Café at 5." Before he knew it the man was gone and Judas continued his journey confused and wondering about the note.

Later that night, at 5 he left the disciples and Jesus with pretence he had to make arraignment for where they would celebrate the Passover. After doing all that, getting the Upper Room, getting the food ordered, Judas made his way to the Devil's Inn. While sitting in a dark, dark, corner sipping Jerusalem's finest, when out of the darkness, a man shows up and sits quietly beside Judas. "Need a little extra cash these days?" the stranger asks. "Can't we all use a little bit extra these days. Times are tough." Judas says. "I know where you can get your hands on a quick 30 pieces of silver, no questions asked," the stranger says. "What do I have to do, kill someone," laughs Judas. "Not really, but almost." The man says. "Just need to know where Jesus will be later and you can have it all. You just have to lead some guys to him. Don't worry about the others because these guys will protect you." The man said. "Here, take 10 pieces now and the rest will be given you when you meet with the high priest around 9 on the night of Passover. You can make an excuse to leave after you find out where he will be." The man tossed the bag with 10 pieces on the table and Judas looked at for a few moments. His hand wanted to reach for it, but his heart said no. he almost reached again, but once more his heart said no. Then the devil entered into him for the temptation was too great and he snatched the bag, stood up and left. The stranger began to speak and Judas stopped with his back to him as the stranger whispered, "See you at the high priests courtyard at 9 on Thursday."

Another decision done.

The final decision this morning has nothing to do with Jesus per se. As I was preparing the third version of today's message the third decision that changed the world wasn't to be Jesus' decision, though we already know that his decision was made at the beginning of creation when Adam and Eve gave in to that slimy, slippery character we call the Devil.

No the last decision belongs to none other than Pilate. You see he had the final say. When he met with Jesus that day and questioned him he could not find anything wrong that Jesus had done to warrant his death. When he called for the religious leaders to make it their own decision they refused. They put Pilate on the spot to do what was right by Roman law. They could not put Jesus to death, but he could. What charge? Well, he said he was a king….their king….but that was no crime against Rome. Caesar was still ruler. What crime then? But Pilate was drowned out by those who cried out to put Jesus to death. Even when Pilate offered for them to chose between a wretch like Barabbas or Jesus, they cried out to release the crook, the thief, the murder. "What shall I do with this other guy who I find no fault with?" "Crucify him." And the decision was made. "Take him away and do as they wish" Pilate told the Centurion as he washed his hands of the situation. "Make an example of him so others will not claim to be his followers."

And so they took Jesus away and hung him on a cross.

Three decisions, one by the chief priest that one man must die. The other by Judas who for some reason beyond our understanding, though many have tried to reason why, turned Jesus in for 30 pieces of silver that he never enjoyed. And the final one, the final judgment from Pilate himself. "Take him away and crucify him."

But there was a fourth decision as well that I shall just mention. For God so loved the world that he gave us his son that whoever believes in him shall have hope, forgiveness,

health, joy and to top it all off, eternal life with him. But the final decision is yours. It's whether you believe or not. It's your decision to receive Christ as your savior or reject him like the crowd did on Good Friday. No one else can decide where you will spend eternity. You do!

Decisions that have changed the world….yup I think this third version sure has the hand of God written all over it. And as Pilate once said, "What I have written, shall be written."