



## Palm Sunday Message

### “Two Riders...The Reckoning”

*“All along the watchtower, Princes kept the view  
While all the women came and went, barefoot servants too  
Outside in the cold distance, a wildcat did howl  
Two riders were approaching, and the winds began to howl.”  
All Along the Watchtower by Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix*

Good Morning Saints and welcome again to our worship on the Palm Sunday. On behalf of Mona and myself I would like to thank our Worship Team, our Music Team and especially our guest musicians who are gifting us this morning with their wonderful skills. And we would especially recognize you this morning, our beloved Circle of Faith, who have taken time from this day to be with us in worship and to welcome us into your hearts and your homes. For us there is no greater honor.

Today, Saints, is a day of both spectacular images and subtle symbols as we accompany Jesus from Bethany into Jerusalem. Jesus’ journey into -- and through -- Jerusalem is rich in irony, symbolism, parable-like messaging and hidden meaning. So, let’s get started then Saints, on our learning journey as well, with today’s Palm Sunday Message entitled: “Two Riders...The Reckoning.”

Palm Sunday, Saints, is all about “compare and contrast.” I remember, vividly back in my English Composition 101 class as a freshman at university. Our professor loved this “compare and contrast” medium to push us deeper into the

subject to discover “*What is the same?*” *What is different?*” and “*What are the forces at work in making the transition happen?*” This is a perfect way to have a deeper look at what is going on, that first Palm Sunday long ago.

But, before we go back Saints, I want to look at a word that I used in the title of today’s message, “Two Riders...the Reckoning.” *Reckoning*...the classic definition for this word is “the settling of accounts,” settling the score...and the word brings with it a lot of tension, a ominous feel that something big and important is about to be solved, once and for all.

I first came upon the word *reckoning* in my favorite movie of all time, “Tombstone,” with Kurt Russell as Wyatt Earp and Val Kilmer as Doc Holliday. In the movie, the town of Tombstone, Arizona is being run by a corrupt sheriff with a longing to stay in power at any cost and is being supported by an occupying army - a gang of outlaw thugs -- called the “Cowboys.” Into this mix come the Earp brothers, led by Wyatt and his lifelong friend Doc Holliday. The Earp Family is just looking for some peace; a fresh start and to live a quiet life, but they get drawn into a struggle for the heart and soul of Tombstone. Throughout the story a mighty tension develops and builds between Johnny Ringo, the self-proclaimed “greatest pistolier in the West,” and Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday. There is a *reckoning* building...tensions building...a settling of accounts is imminent ...a final showdown that everyone knows is coming between Wyatt Earp and Johnny Ringo. Wyatt knows that he is no match for Johnny with a pistol yet decides to face the reckoning anyway. Yet in the early morning before the showdown, while Wyatt is still asleep, Doc Holliday substitutes himself for Wyatt, takes Wyatt’s place in the reckoning with Johnny Ringo. For even though Doc Holliday is weak and sick with tuberculosis, there is no one more skilled and right to see the *reckoning* of the Vision and the story to its proper conclusion. Compare and Contrast....

Also, in the title of this mornings’ message is “Two Riders,” I hope that you noticed Jasnam’s musical intro to the sermon today. *All Along the Watchtower*, by Jimi Hendrix with lyrics by Bob Dylan. I am not sure if Bob Dylan had Jesus and Pilate’s entry into Jerusalem in mind when he penned the song, but the words set the stage and develop the tension for this Palm Sunday reckoning in an extraordinary way:

*“All along the watchtower, Princes kept the view  
While all the women came and went, barefoot servants too.*

*Outside in the cold distance, a wildcat did howl*

*Two riders were approaching, and the winds began to howl.”*

The Two Riders approaching and entering Jerusalem that morning could not have been more different. That morning Jesus set out from Bethany on his ride to Jerusalem. Bethany, a leper colony, and home to the societal underbelly of Jewish life, the ritually unclean. In the contemporary Jewish world of that day, one would have to bathe in the Temple Cleansing pools before entering the Temple if one even gazed upon the leper. And Jesus now, riding the “colt” of Scripture, a small donkey. Together, in simplicity and humility, carrying the leper’s societal burden, Jesus and the donkey approach Jerusalem, approach the *reckoning*.

Pilate’s journey into Jerusalem that day could not be more different. His journey has begun not from a leper’s ghetto but from the amazing port city of Acre. A splendid place developed by the Romans to logistically support their occupation of Israel and the Middle East and home to Pilate’s palatial residence. And on that morning of reckoning, Pilate was astride his powerful warhorse, in full armor and regalia. Leading a Roman Legion into Jerusalem to ensure that order and the status quo were maintained. A Legion on the move was a noisy affair. Horses neighing, armor clacking, commands being shouted. Pilate and his garrison approach Jerusalem’s Western Gate -- here our Indigenous symbol of the Medicine Wheel helps us understand. The West...the color Black...Sunset...the end of a Day...the cave, hibernation, the bear...old ways.

Now Jesus’ journey into Jerusalem has begun in relative silence from Bethany to the Temple Mount. Just a few muffled words and yawns from his disciples and a few followers and the click and clack of the donkey’s feet on the stones of the trail. And then Jesus sees before him, Jerusalem’s Eastern gate...The Golden Gate.

The **Golden Gate** is the only eastern gate of the Temple Mount and one of only two that used to offer access into the city from that side. The Hebrew name is the **Gate of Mercy**, and according to Jewish tradition and the Prophet Ezekiel, the Divine Presence appeared through the eastern Gate, and will appear again when the Anointed One, the Messiah comes again. Again, the Medicine Wheel helps us understand...The East; Sunrise, New Beginnings, the Direction of New Learning, yellow, golden...New Ways.

And then Jesus sees before Him, those who have come to greet him, the poor, the sick, the curious. Now erupting in song before the donkey and Jesus and his friends. “Hosanna, Hosanna!” waving branches. *Hosanna* from the Aramaic, “Save

us,” “Rescue us.” And as Jesus approaches the Golden Gate from the East the crowds get bigger; the entreaties get louder. The tension builds.

From the West, Pilate and Romans are greeted as well. By the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Temple Priests and the rich and powerful of Jerusalem’s society. These Jewish Power Brokers have a love/hate relationship with the Roman occupiers. For the Jewish elites, the Romans are a tool to maintain their societal, religious and cultural hold on the people of Jerusalem. The powerful rejoiced Pilates’ entry as well. The restorers of order have arrived. The keepers of the status quo have come. Cheers rise from the Western Gate.

The Warhorse and The Donkey...East and West cheering louder and louder for very same reasons. Their “saviors” have come.

*“Two riders were approaching, and the Winds began to howl”*

*“Two riders were approaching, and the Winds began to howl”*

*The Reckoning Has Begun...*

*Compare and Contrast....*

On that Palm Sunday many years ago, if you asked a resident of Jerusalem who Jesus was...you would get a variety of answers. To Pilate and centurions and legions Jesus was a mild irritation. The Jews at the Passover feast could be a rowdy bunch anyway but now there were some growing threats to the continuation of Roman power and occupation of Jerusalem by the Zealots. The Zealots were armed, Jewish revolutionaries who advocated the violent overthrow of Roman rule. Jesus certainly wasn’t a Zealot and was most likely presented relatively low on the Roman Threat Index. But Pilate and the Romans were definitely not liking being roused from their posh accommodations in Acre and having to travel to and reside in crowded and noisy Jerusalem. But order must be maintained.

To the religious and societal Jewish leaders and elders, Jesus was a threat. A threat to the maintenance of their religious, societal and economic power. A threat to their generations of beliefs. Their Messiah was going to be a powerful and might military and political leader that would rip Israel from the choking grasp of the Romans. Jesus is not -- *could not* -- be their Messiah. Jesus is a leader of societal rabble, the least and the lost. But his following is growing larger day by day. Something needs to be done. Order must be restored.

To the believers and the curious on that Palm Sunday, Jesus was an answer, a New Way, a profound teacher, apocalyptic preacher, healer and miracle worker. Perhaps this is the change we have been praying for and hoping for.

### Order vs. Change

#### “Compare and Contrast”

I believe Saints, that Jesus knew exactly what he was doing on the first Palm Sunday. Jesus and the donkey were riding headlong into the *Reckoning*, the settling of accounts with Pilate and his Warhorse, the Romans and the Jewish powers. Jesus had only one thing on his mind that day, he had work to do. His sacred Vision Quest must be completed at any cost. Now was the time of Reckoning, standing for us...Jesus tore apart the Temple on Monday physically and theologically. Overturning the sacrilege tables of the money changers, Jesus took on the ceremonial establishment. Inside the Temple, Jesus took on the most learned spiritual leaders of the day and turned their theological world upside down. On Tuesday, the Reckoning continues...and with each intellectual and theological defeat, the Jewish powers knew that “something had to be done.” And Pilate and Romans were the ones to do it. Order must be maintained, societal, theological, spiritual and political. Power must be retained. The Reckoning is upon us...the settling of accounts is here and now.

This Palm Sunday...Jesus is spoiling for a fight, a contest, a confrontation to bring about the successful conclusion of His VisionQuest of Salvation and Peace. A fight not with armor and swords and warhorses and chariots but a fight, a confrontation and contest of ideas, and possibilities...a new way of seeing and believing. A reckoning for the soul and spirit of the People of God.

#### ***From Luke 12: 49-56***

***“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what a stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you I have come to bring division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two, and two against three; they will be divided. Father against son, and son against father. Mother against daughter and daughter against mother. Mother-in-laws and daughters-in-law all against each other.***

***He said to the crowds, when you see clouds and dust rising in the West, you immediately say, “A storm is coming!” And so, it happens. And when you see the***

*South wind blowing, you say, "There will be scorching heat!" And it happens. You know how to interpret the appearance of the Earth and Sky and the world around you. But why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"*

### All Along the Watchtower

There must be some kind of way out of here  
Said the joker to the thief  
There's too much confusion  
I can't get no relief

The rich men, they drink my wine  
Poor men dig my earth  
None will level on the line  
Nobody offered his word.

No reason to get excited  
The thief, he kindly spoke  
There are many here among us  
Who feel that life is but a joke  
But, uh, but you and I, we've been through that  
And this is not our fate  
So let us stop talking falsely now  
The hour's getting late...

All along the watchtower  
Princes kept the view  
While all the women came and went  
Barefoot servants, too  
Well outside in the cold distance  
A wildcat did growl  
Two riders were approaching  
And the wind began to howl...

From East and from the West the Reckoning us upon us. Compare and Contrast...

From which direction do you ride? May God bless us all.

*Two riders were approaching  
And the wind began to howl....*