My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Lord God who reveals truths to our Spirits and souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.
 I’ve mentioned to some of you my reading list when I’m not studying theology. Where I grew up in the plains of Colorado they didn’t require any classic literature, so I missed out on reading such tomes as Huckleberry Finn, Silas Marner, and the like until later in life. Another one of those books was Uncle Tom’s Cabin which transformed how folks saw slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote the book, often saw visions from God in her life, and these inspired her to write the story of a Christ figure who lost everything, willing to sacrifice his life to save others, and was unjustly tormented and killed.

Her book was a best-seller, and shocked readers by revealing the truth about the viciousness of slavery and its conditions. It also ripped away the racist myth, still repeated today, that Africans were better off as slaves because they could not handle their own affairs and lives and should be grateful to their owners. But freedom is never for sale nor belongs to anyone else, and Abraham Lincoln famously greeted Ms. Stowe with the phrase, “is this the little woman who made this great war?”

When it comes to books of the Bible, I bet you didn’t know this, but Zechariah was one of the most well-read and quoted in Jesus’ time. This prophet lived in the 6th century BC. The first 8 chapters help us understand the efforts to encourage and will the people to rebuild the temple, because they had lost hope following their return to Judea after exile to Babylon. The final 5 chapters looked ahead to God’s covenant and the coming reign of God and God’s servant who would draw all nations together to live in peace. Zechariah’s words, for those living under Roman occupation in Jesus’ time some 600 years later, helped the people fight the myth that might makes right. Even though they were under the heel of a conquering Emperor, God would bring together the known world under a new understanding that had very little to do with armed guards. Prophecy is a powerful tool for a people without hope, because it gives them hope.

Zechariah isn’t well-read today. Maybe that’s because we don’t see how he re-interpreted the whole idea of the Messiah. Matthew knows that if we don’t know Zechariah, then we don’t see Jesus clearly. In Jesus’ time, Romans held these parades of victory when conquering other peoples. The Generals came on war horses, leading a procession of treasures looted from the conquered people, followed by the captives chained one against another as a public service announcement to say, “this is what happens to folks to dare to defy Roman rule”.

Romans claim their king, the emperor, is the son of a god and savior foretold by the myths of the Trojan War. The emperor would be the one to bring peace to all nations—what historians called the pax Romana, the peace of Rome—but under military means.

Jesus knows this. He had a choice: enter like a triumphant Roman Ruler and conquering hero, or come to bring peace as described in Zechariah. The imagery in Zechariah uses two different words, a donkey and colt, to describe the animal the king will ride in bringing peace. And so Matthew does the same. The critical element here is that Jesus is recognized as righteous, humble and poor, but also ready to bring peace to his own people and the whole world. Jesus’ promise reaches beyond the borders of the pax Romana, and he rides a donkey into Jerusalem, into a kingship of humility, but one which is more powerful than the current rulers can ever imagine. It’s an empire of peace and love, a deliverance, a salvation that is here for all peoples, even the conquered ones.

Some 30 years after Jesus’ death, Paul addresses the Philippians on this matter to help us understand this. Phillippi was a Roman city, and many of its residents were military retirees. As members of the military, they have been granted all the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship. Most of them had never seen Rome or knew what they were fighting about or for. Paul tells them to follow the example of Jesus, that although he was entitled to all the rights and privileges of equality with God, he didn’t treat those equalities as something to be wielded or taken advantage of. Paul tells them that Jesus took the form of the humble servant of the people, servant to even the slaves, in order to establish this kingdom of peace as his triumph. It was an odd message to the soldiers of the emperor: to help restore the fortunes of the ones they encountered rather than dominate them as the way to peace. Whoever was in charge at any particular moment wouldn’t matter: it was love that wins, and love is the true strength that preserves the life of others, not subjugates it.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

Palm Sunday lets us join with those who acclaimed Jesus, not Caesar, as Lord two thousand years ago. We still wave our palms and shout “Hose-A-ana”, which means save us. But God expects us to act in giving our lives to peace: lead not by power but in service to others; create peace that lifts up all lives.

Jesus redefined who is ruler based on who he found in Zechariah’s prophecy. That’s the leadership that we need in this day and age, one who lifts up everyone, and doesn’t say that others are less worthy of their rights or personhood for any reason. And so maybe it’s time we re-read some of the old best-sellers, like Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or heaven forbid, the Bible and the prophets of old. Maybe if we did we might make those echoes of Palm Sunday not just our cries but our mission, and start to bear the cross as our own rather than waiting for somebody to come along and sacrifice for us so we don’t have to.

Jesus is coming to make his ministry **our** ministry. Jesus’ peace is **our** peace. And ultimately, the triumph of old, of God’s prophets, should be ours, too. That’s what salvation really is.

And for that, thanks be to God, Amen.