

A Sermon for Robbinsdale United Church of Christ
March 16, 2008 – 6th Sunday in Lent – Palm Sunday
Rev. T. Michael Rock

Scripture Reading – Matthew 21:1-11

Sermon Title: “Election Year Hosannas”

(open with prayer)

Introduction:

We find ourselves on this day in the midst of one of the most exciting election cycles in history. With 12 states yet to hold their primaries or caucus or prima-caucus, we have already had more people participate in this election season than ever before. It is amazing to see the energy with which people support their candidate and pour out their pocketbooks. I am in awe of the process and find myself wondering if there are any natural parallels between the practice of politics and the practice of faith.

There are some obvious ones that almost go without mentioning.

- The more you participate, the better it feels.
- Persuasive speeches and Preaching are eerily similar.
- Sooner or later we find out that everyone, even leaders, have their flaws.

One thing I didn't expect to discover was the Christ-centered approach to the speeches I keep reading and hearing. Every time I tune into or pick up one of these so-called “victory” speeches by the candidates I see the same stories. The candidates are using the formula of parables to talk about their policies. While Jesus used things like, “the kingdom of God is like the woman who had ten coins and lost one . . .,” what I hear from the candidates is, “When I am President, the single mother I met won't have to worry about foreclosure.” Or, “When I am President, the hard working factory worker will no longer have to choose between a health care premium and college tuition.” Or, “When I am President, you will feel safe and secure enough to pursue your dream.” This is what the world will feel like and be like, the reign of President McClintma is assured in.

Jesus used to use examples of folks in his audience to talk about God and faith and bringing about a new way of being. For Jesus, it was stories about crops and water when the farmers gathered, it was stories about merchants, land owners, and vineyards when the city folks came, when he took the street he talked about a place for the poor at the banquet table, and among the religious leaders he spoke about heart of the law rather than the letter of the law. Jesus knew how to be on the

stump. Jesus knew how to excite a crowd and make them feel like they were a part of something much bigger.

The candidates use the same strategy, in the union hall they talk to laborers, on the college campus they act as if the young vote is all that matters, in the nursing homes they talk about the priority of medicare and prescription drugs, and in the St. Patrick's Day parades, they wear green and kiss fake blarney stones. They use the techniques of political organizing that were once used by Jesus. They are ready to come into the conventions with banners flying high on their way to leadership, power, and change.

AND THIS IS WHERE THEY LOSE THE IMAGE OF JESUS.

This is when they stop listening to the people in the streets, factories, and nursing homes, and instead surround themselves with their richest and most powerful allies. All the talk about humility, democracy, and hearing what the people say is lost in the raised podium separateness of modern politics. In this election year, and all others, the candidates have forgotten how to enter. Gospel scholar, Luke Johnson says that the entry into Jerusalem is the most important story in all of scripture because it talks about who Jesus was, is, and will always be.

The stories of Jesus preceded his arrival. He was a teacher, a healer, and a prophet. He confronted the Pharisees and spoke of God in a new way. Some even called him Elijah, and some even the Messiah. The expectation grew in the run up to the Jerusalem primary. The people were currently under the control of an absent war mongering Emperor who was bent on preserving domination no matter the cost. The Jews and gentiles had had enough. They looked for someone who could change years of oppression and injustice. They longed for this change and hoped that change would come to reunite the Jews, and drive the armies of the Emperor out of the desert and back to land across the sea. They longed for a new Commander in Chief.

What they got was a leader who understood that all politics is local. Jesus had a choice in that story. He could have led a parade of shouts and cheers, he could have come riding in on a tall horse, he could have made the people come to him. Instead, Jesus chose the method that matched his message. Jesus rode in on a dirty, smelly donkey. Jesus was no higher than anyone else. Jesus came to listen as well as to lead a revolution. Jesus remembered that this election and this revolution was not about speeches, but about the hopes and aspirations of the people. Jesus came to show us how to lead each other.

(hopes from the congregation)

Then Jesus left so that we would carry on the method and means of justice, compassion, and love.

AMEN.