



St. Michael's Church

CHARLESTON, SC

SUNDAY, MARCH 25
PALM SUNDAY

ZECHARIAH 9:1-10
MARK 11:1-11

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE SERVANTS
OF OTHERS.

TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM,
OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM,
AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE.

Imagine for a minute, being booed, at your own funeral! This is exactly what happened when one of the most hated, corrupt and selfish kings in the history of humanity died. I'm talking about that brutish 19th century King Leopold the 2nd of Belgium. As King of Belgium, Leopold became the sole owner of the African country of the Congo, and abused the natives to produce rubber and ivory. He lead out of fear, torture, and brute force, with all profits going to his own personal projects. It's estimated that 10 million people died under his regime. Leopold was hated all over Europe, including in his own country so that by the time he died, his death was cause for total celebration.

When it comes right down to it, there are two kinds of living, I deserve, or I serve. The "I deserve Life" is the entitled life, an affliction everywhere in culture today. This deserved entitlement is best defined as a delusion built on self-centeredness. Personally, I know I'm in the wrong frame of mind when I come home after a long evening meeting, see that large piece of cake and say, "I deserve this." No I don't! It's a delusion! C'mon, you've been there. I deserve to be treated this way! I deserve the front of the line!

From the mundane to the most serious, this "I deserve more" mindset can destroy marriages, careers, and legacies. How many politicians have uttered, "But I deserve this"

before a fall from grace.

This is what makes Palm Sunday so amazing! Palm Sunday and Holy Week are about as opposite from the “I-deserve” life than anything on earth could be! The opposite of “I deserve” is “I’ve come to serve.” The people gathered for that first Palm Sunday are saying Jesus the warrior King is going to save us. We deserve this! Jesus is going to smite all our enemies, Hosanna! By the way, Hosanna doesn’t mean praise, it means save us now!

Jesus knows they have it all wrong! He’s come not to save them from warring factions and enemies on the outside, Jesus has actually come to save them from their insides, their own sin within. Jesus was coming into Jerusalem that day to begin His journey to the cross, to sacrifice His life so they, and we, might live. The ultimate form of “I Serve.”

These misplaced expectations about deserve and serve are what makes Palm Sunday the strangest Sunday of the year. That’s why we come in to a celebratory parade, but leave by reading the ultimate story of sacrificial love, the story of the crucifixion. It’s why Jesus says in Matthew 20, “I came not to be served, but to serve, “ by dying for us.

The best visual of servanthood is the donkey. If King Leopold were processing in to Jerusalem, he would have used a large elephant, not a donkey. There is simply no other animal that symbolizes self sacrifice and servanthood more than a donkey! So, we don’t have a donkey to put on a show, but instead as a visual of what the I Serve life looks like!

You see, a donkey in Palestine was an animal that represented peace, unlike the elephant and horse that symbolized war and victory. So when Jesus rides in to Jerusalem, he’s introducing a kind of peace that will come from sacrificing himself for our sin. The end result is our peace, which, if we accept it, brings us the peace that we have been forgiven and eternally saved. That’s the peace coming from the total self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But there’s so much more to the story!

There are two supernatural aspects to this story that bring it home. First, serve over deserve is God’s master plan for humanity. Jesus riding on a donkey was predicted 400 years earlier! One of the very last prophets of the Old Testament is Zechariah. Zechariah’s only goal for his book called Zechariah was to point the Jews to a future servant savior. Zechariah tells the nation, Rejoice! Your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey. He will proclaim peace to the nations and His rule will extend from sea to sea. Four hundred years later, Jesus fulfills the prophecy as the ultimate servant leader by offering Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Complete and down to the detail of using a donkey as Zechariah said!

Second, serve over deserve is made clear through the fact that Jesus orders a donkey that had never been ridden. Why? To help us know that Jesus is the sacrificial savior unlike any other in the history of the world! Totally unique to a world that had never before seen this kind of servanthood, or this kind of self-sacrifice.

On this Palm Sunday, do you see how radical this serve over deserve mindset is? Do you see why the donkey is not just empty drama but an historic pictorial definition of serve over deserve! One we have given our lives to Jesus who through grace gave his life for us, we are forgiven and free, eternally saved from the fires of hell. Jesus then calls us through the Holy Spirit to live an earthly life quite the opposite of entitlement. He calls us to live modeling what He did for us, by denying self, sacrificing our-self, and serving others.

I serve. What would that look like in your marriage? Your friendships? Your business? My friends, I could stand up here all day and describe to you what it means to serve over de-serve. Instead, I'm cutting this sermon in half, to invite you on a pilgrimage this week. A pilgrimage defined is a journey to be closer to God, to know Him and to see him in a new way, and to hear what he's teaching. I invite you on a Holy Week Pilgrimage where you will see with your own eyes and ears what it means to serve over deserve.

On Maundy Thursday, Jesus serving by washing feet. We will live out the same.

On Good Friday, Jesus serving through ultimate sacrifice on the cross. We will carry that cross.

On Holy Saturday, we will sacrifice our hearts through private confession with clergy and experience new life!

Then, and only then, are we ready for Easter! We will sing alleluias louder because we will have lived through what it cost Jesus!

This Holy Week Pilgrimage exists to put ourselves into that servant story. But it will cost you. It will cost you your routine. It will cost you your schedule. Yet, you will never understand serve over deserve until you experience the Holy Week Pilgrimage.

Let me be personal. Last year, it all came clear to me during Good Friday. Our choirs were singing the Oratorio when, at some point near the end, I saw our organist Matthew Wilkinson do a very strange thing. He leans over and, while keeping his feet on the organ pedals, He turns off the whole organ! When you turn an organ off, it shuts off all the blowers. When you turn an organ off and keep the pedals down, the result is a perfectly incredible, horrible, horrible sound, like all the air coming out of a bagpipe. A sound representing death. That's when it hit me again. The organ dies, the lights go off. The total death of Jesus for my sin.

We know this, but we need art, the senses, the seeing, the hearing, and the smelling to make the most breathtaking display of servanthood the world had and has ever known come back to life! Serve over Deserve, you've got to witness it, to live it.

Let us pray.