

Palm Reader

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell

 *John 12:12-19*

I have never been to a palm reader. Nor do I ever intend to. My life is confusing enough as it is I don't need any more thoughts put into my head as to where I'm going and what I'm doing. I am happy to give myself over to the gentle nudges of the Holy Spirit. But I did a little research on palm reading – palmistry as it is called – which for these purposes means I read the Wikipedia page – to learn about what a palm reader looks for when reading a palm. There is the life line – that is supposed to tell of the vitality and vigor of a person's life, there is the heart line which discloses matters of the heart and a person's emotional well-being, there is the head line that is supposed to say something about the person's mind and how it works (I wonder why I don't have a head line?) and there is the fate line that indicates the consequences we might face. And there are a bunch of other lines. For me there is the line left over from when I fell off my bicycle when I was eleven years old. I hate to think what that might mean. But people who are into palmistry subscribe, I suppose, to the supposition that you can tell a lot about a person by reading their palm.

Now as I said I don't put a lot of stock in the lines and wrinkles and scars of a person's palm – but on the other hand I suppose our palms tell us a lot about ourselves and other people. At least in respect to how we use our palms. When you think of it our palms send off all sorts of signals that are read by ourselves and by others. We can do all sorts of things with our palms that convey all sorts of messages. A simple wave of the palm sends a greeting. Holding still a palm says stop come no closer. A grasp and shake of the palm says welcome

or seals the deal. A slap of the palm conveys outrage or offense. A clap of the palm signals congratulations on a job well done. A holding out of the palm suggests payment due. A holding out of two palms indicates an openness. Sweaty palms means anxiety or fear. A clenched palm suggests outrage or an impending punch. Holding one another's palms suggests unity and fellowship. The palm tells a lot about a person.

Now as far as I can tell when the Bible talks about our life beyond this life, i.e. our eternal life in communion with God and with each other – there is only one mention of what we will be doing with our palms in the heavenly community. John the writer of the book of Revelation recounts his vision of the heavenly community and says that they and we – this multitude that no one can count from every nation, tribe, peoples and language – we will be standing before the throne of God and the Lamb of God and we will be robed in white and what we will be doing with our palms – is that we will be holding with in our palms – palm branches. We will be waving palm branches. There was a great multitude, John writes, which no one could count from every nation, from all tribes, peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb - robed in white - with palm branches in their hands. It is a way I suppose for John to get the word across that what you and I are focused on today – the great palms parade with Jesus into the Jerusalem – that this is just a foretaste of what to expect when we start living the real life. If there is anything that Christians believe it is that that the eternal life we look forward to in heaven – is actually the real deal. The real show. The real experience. Everything here is rehearsal. Everything here is a run through. Everything here is simulation. Spring training. But when we join the multitude which no one can number that's

showtime. Everything counts. Regular season. The Final Four (dare I say).

So when you and I show up on a Palm Sunday and read the story and sing our Hosanna's and wave our palm branches – it is a getting ready for when life becomes real. And when life becomes real – we will be waving. We will be swaying. We will with opening our palms to the beauty and the glory and the wonder and the majesty of God. And it just won't get any better than that.

It makes me think of the couple of U2 concerts I've been to - Genevieve, you're not the only one who goes to U2 concerts - and they used to always finish their concerts with the song "40". It's a beautiful song and you have these 40,000 – 50,000 people standing and singing and swaying and holding up their palms – and what many of them don't know is that Bono and the band are leading them in singing a psalm out of the Bible – Psalm 40. And so this stadium of people are singing together:

*I waited patiently for the Lord
He inclined and heard my cry
He brought me up out of the pit
Out of the mire and clay*

*I will sing, sing a new song
I will sing, sing a new song*

*He set my feet upon a rock
And made my footsteps firm
Many will see
Many will see and fear
I will sing, sing a new song*

That always felt to me like a foretaste of heaven.

So I guess that's a lot of what we do on a Palm Sunday – put to rightful use our palms by grabbing onto our palms and singing the old song ... which is the new song and gaining for ourselves a little taste of the time to come.

We join that procession of palms in our window back there – marching up the Mount of Zion through the cross and toward the summit of the heavenly city where the rivers of life flow and the palm trees sway and death is no more, neither mourning nor crying nor pain anymore.

It matters what you do with your palm. It matters what march you're in. Because the truth of the matter is people are reading our palms. People are anxious to see what we are doing with our palms. What march we are in with our palms. Because we're all trying to figure out in this crazy old world – is what is real? What is permanent? What is everlasting? Where is this whole thing headed? Like the old hymn:

**“When life becomes real – we will be waving.
We will be swaying. We will be opening our
palms to the beauty and the glory and the
wonder and the majesty of God. And it just
won't get any better than that.**

*We're marching to Zion,
Beautiful, beautiful Zion;
We're marching upward to Zion,
The beautiful city of God.*

People are watching our march – reading our palms.

It makes me remember to when I was 10 years old and the phone call came to the house from the Roseville, Michigan City jail. They had arrested my father – my clean cut Presbyterian pastor father – they had arrested my father for marching. He had been marching to Zion with a bunch of other brothers and sisters in Christ – their palms holding onto placards – in the wake of the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. – they had been marching for civil rights – waving their palms – and the chief priests of police didn't appreciate it. So they threw them in the slammer. It made for an interesting Session meeting at the end of the month.

Eleven years later, maybe because the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, his youngest son ends up marching down Broadway Ave. in New York City – marching to Zion – holding onto my own little placard palm protesting the crazy nuclear arms war. No paddy wagons at this parade – just a few thousand Jesus followers trying to sing a new song.

We had a few million yesterday marching in cities across the globe - palming their placards - for a different, less violent world. Some of you were there.

People are watching our march – they are reading our palms.

It's why I love our logo here at Church of the Palms. It's on the front of your bulletin – it's got this palm inside a heart, it's got this heart inside a palm. Read our palm, we say – it has a heart. Read our heart, it has a palm. As if to say that we are trying to be the community that isn't afraid to do some

waving and some swaying and some singing and some marching. And on Palm Sunday we remember again what all the waving and swaying and singing and marching is all about – it's about this Galilean rabbi – this Messiah – this Son of God who leads the procession. Marches us up to Zion – because he has come to make the world right. He has come to bless the poor in spirit, to bless the persecuted, to bless the merciful, to bless those who hunger and thirst for righteousness – we huddle ourselves around Jesus and grasp our palms and we wave in whatever way we are called to wave. Feed the hungry in our food pantry. Teach children in our tutoring ministry. Outfit homeless kids for school. Provide a space for counseling folks who are trying to hold on. March down to Honduras and come alongside folks who are struggling. Offer a preschool for parents who need help caring for their children.

Dare we imagine that's what our Palms Center is about? For some it's where the parade will begin – as we open our doors and wave our palms around the Messiah and people will come and wonder what all the hubbub is about – and they will see this love for Jesus and they will feel this love from Jesus. Kids hanging out. Adults hanging out. And we will meet them and love them and show them our open palms and invite them to grab a palm and join us in the march to Zion. And we'll sing a new song and we'll get this taste of the real thing.

And I have this picture of when I was a teenager and we had this hippy looking youth director. Hair down to here. And he had this vision of busting the walls out with high school kids. And he got this idea about taking the basement of the church and turning it into a weekly rock concert venue. And he would invite rock bands from all over Detroit to come and play. And they weren't going to be Christian bands – they were going to be bands

that were playing music that was on the local AM/ FM radio – music that students were listening to. And his idea was to get them inside the walls of the church so they could see our palms. They could hear that we cared about them. They could see the start of the parade. And he took the idea to the Session and that made for another interesting Session meeting. But against their better judgment they gave the palms up. And the bands came and the students came and it got a little crazy ... because young human beings bring young human being issues – and we would average about 300 kids a night. And some of those kids joined the parade. They met the Messiah and they joined the parade. They grabbed a palm and they started the march to a new song. That's what happens when you put your heart together with your palm.

So maybe it's going to be -- kids inside the Palms Center singing their own songs on the way to singing a new song. Maybe it's going to be basketball and volleyball and pickle ball for God's sake. Maybe it's going to be retirees doing some exercise and grabbing a cup of coffee. Maybe it's going to be ballroom dancing and perimeter walking. Who knows? But in the end they'll be reading our palms and meeting the Messiah. And they'll see our hearts and maybe just maybe ... they'll ask where does the march start? Where does the march start? The march to Zion. Beautiful, beautiful Zion. The beautiful city of God.



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March 25, 2018



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