

The Sunday of the Passion—Palm Sunday  
April 14, 2019

Text: Deuteronomy 32:36-39  
Theme: “Deliverance”

Play-Doh, don't you just love Play-Doh? I don't think it has changed much since I was a kid. It is so pliable and easily shaped, which I think is the idea. Our Granddaughter, Emma, really enjoys it. It is even more fun if Grandpa or especially Grandma plays with her. You can make all these good shapes. You can make ropes or snakes. You can shape into a coin, even impress a real coin on top (of course the image will be reversed). You can make it into a rock. But if you tried to stand on such a rock, it will let you down in a hurry. It's good fun, but it's all pretend.

Our text is at the end of The Song of Moses. We don't know the tune and we don't know the rhythm, but we know the reason. It's a witness to Israel, even a warning against pretend gods. Such gods can be fun or colorful, but they really could not, cannot, save. Such gods will always let you down. This song would remind them of the perfect Rock, the sure Deliverer. In this song Moses puts before Israel the consequences of unfaithfulness to the Rock. It is also a witness of God's faithfulness to them, always. It will serve as a way to call them back.

The temptation remains tempting to run after other gods, the “fun” ones. They are no more able to hold up or deliver than Play-Doh.

There is only one true Rock. “See now that I, even I am He, and there is no god beside me.” (v. 39) At the first part of the Song we hear, “The Rock (not “a” rock), His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice. A God full of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is He.” (v. 4) The Rock had chosen Israel, not the other way around. He had chosen them to be a nation of priests, a people of His own possession. As they walked in His ways, they would be a beacon of light in a world of darkness. “He found them in a desert land...He encircled him, He cared for him, He

kept him as the apple of His eye.” (v. 10) Earlier God had told them He had chosen them not because they were more numerous, but because He loved them and He was keeping the oath He had sworn to their forefathers (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

Now all this should sound familiar. This choosing spoken of in the OT of Israel leads into the choosing of the church in the NT. We, brothers and sisters in Christ, are a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people of God’s own possession. He has chosen us so that we may declare His praise, the praises of the One who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. We are built on the Rock. We are built together as a holy temple.

But there is all that Play-Doh out there, gods of many colors, a lot of variety. For Israel there were those choice that would later be laid out by Joshua: the gods beyond the River that your forefathers served, the gods of the Egyptians, and the gods of the peoples of the land that they were about to possess. There was Baal, and Asherah, and Chemosh, and Molech, and the Queen of Heaven, and the hosts of heaven. There are still plenty of gods around, a lot of isms: materialistic determinism, hedonism, intellectualism, therapeutic deism, nihilism, and the overarching meism.

Come play with us. We are the fun gods, maybe. The Moabites, the Midianites and the Amorites would call out to Israel to come and play with them. The festivals could include food and dancing, and even in some cases, sex (Numbers 25:1-9). In the Song we hear, "But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook

God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. <sup>16</sup> They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger.” (15, 16) They would try their hands at the Play-Doh.

The Mediaites and the Christianites now call out, “come play with us.” By the Mediaites I mean those speaking in the media. Now this is quite extensive, quite a chorus, for I’m speaking not only of the national media, but our contacts in social

media, those not connected to Christ, but with their roots put down elsewhere calling out to us. By Christianites I mean those who want to be under the wings of the church, but who want to bring the gods of this present age in. Play-Doh is easily shaped. Would we let the gods of this present age shape us?

Such gods do not deliver. They are not rocks; no, they are pits of mire. Israel is reminded of the true Rock, reminded of His faithfulness. They can call to mind His dominance over the so-called gods of Egypt. He had provided and sustained them in the wilderness. They are warned in the Song, “And I will heap disaster on them; I will spend my arrows on them. Outdoors the sword shall bereave, and indoors terror, for young man and woman alike, the nursing child with the man of gray hair.” (23, 25)

Play-Doh gods are soft and pliable, but not harmless. “They sacrificed to demons that were no gods...<sup>18</sup> You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth.” The prince of demons still prowls about seeking someone to devour. No, not gods, pits of destruction. It doesn’t matter the color or the shape of that god. It can be shaped and reshaped, but there will no sure footing, only a sinking deeper into the mire. Any Play-Doh rope thrown to rescue won’t get the job done.

But there is deliverance, deliverance found in the Rock, found on the Rock. He tells us, “I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.” (v. 39) The One from whom no can deliver delivers by being delivered into the hands of men. It is just as He told His disciples, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.” (Matthew 17:22) Today is the day that we see Him entering Jerusalem. The Greatest becomes as the lowly. He is in very nature God, yet we see Him riding into Jerusalem, “humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (Matthew 21:5; Zechariah 9:9) Everyone is quite excited and rightly so.

This is the promised Deliverer, the Son of Man. It is proper they should strew their garments and the palm branches in His path.

They have high hopes for him. They hope soon they will see him seated on the throne of David. Herod and Pilate will just have to get out or be thrown out. Soon the enemies will be gone. The good life will begin, the life of abundance with no thought of scarcity or no fear of enemies. Yes, they had high hopes, great hopes, but their hopes were too low and too small.

The highest of hope are in this Highest One who humbles Himself. We see the ultimate humility as He becomes obedient unto death, even death on a cross. He says in our Gospel lesson for today “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And when I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to myself.” (John 12:31-32)

We are drawn to Christ, drawn by His great love for us. He gives Himself into death that we may have life. We were mired down in the pit of sin and death, but He comes down and takes our mire upon Himself and pulls us out. Our risen Lord Jesus is our Rock, the Rock of our salvation. “For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. <sup>6</sup> He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. <sup>7</sup> On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.” (Psalm 62:5-7). He is a Rock higher than I (Psalm 61:2.) This sure Rock will not be moved. He will not be crushed, molded, or washed away. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He is indeed the Rock of our salvation. He lives. He has conquered death. Through faith in Him we have already gone from death to life. One day we will die, but those grounded on Him will awake in His presence. We live for Him now. In Him is fullness of life. We read in verses 45-47 of the song, “<sup>45</sup> And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, <sup>46</sup> he said to them, "Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your

children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. <sup>47</sup> For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”

Jesus says whoever hears His words and puts them into practice will be like the wise man who built His house on the rock. Though the rains may come and the waters may rise, the house will not be swept away. (Matthew 7:24)

We are high on the Rock but this is not a haughty position. We read in our lesson from Philippians 2, “Let this mind be in you that is also in Christ Jesus.” Then we read how that was a mind, the very mind of God, not of arrogance, but service. In the verses before our reading we find, “Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also the interest. (Philippians 2:3-4) This is not a sticking my nose in your business interest, but a “how could I help” interest. It happens as we leave behind the squishiness of meism to be built on the Rock.

Play-Doh gods are tempted and colorful. But no matter how they are molded, these gods shaped by human hands from the desires of the sinful nature are gods of destruction. We stand on the sure stone of Christ. For His sake. Amen