

1 When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples **2** and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. **3** If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." **4** They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, **5** some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" **6** They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. **7** Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. **8** Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. **9** Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! **10** Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"
11 Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Many years ago, my husband and I had an opportunity to go to Paris. Of course, when you go to Paris, you do all the things – Eifel Tower, Notre Dame, Sacre Coeur (Cur), the Catacombs, and naturally the Louvre Museum...and if you go there, you naturally are looking for one thing – the Mona Lisa. So, imagine my surprise, traveling all the way to Paris, all the way to the Louvre, and all the excitement building to see this masterpiece, only to get there and discover: 1. Comparatively, it is a very small painting, only about 2 feet by 3 feet. 2. It is behind thick glass and 3. there is a monstrous crowd of people also there to see it. You can't even get close enough to see Mona Lisa smile. I hate crowds, so needless to say, we found somewhere else to be and after all the hype of it being a Paris "Must See," I left a bit disappointed.

I sense that same feeling when reading the Gospel of Mark's version of Palm Sunday. Mark's Gospel implies that people were anticipating Jesus' arrival. I can imagine the curiosity and the excited expectation of Jesus coming to town. People are finding their places along the street, taking off their cloaks in anticipation of throwing them down and making a carpet for the king riding a donkey, they are handing out palm branches to the kids and sharing them with their neighbors, maybe they are singing songs or sharing stories of all they've heard about Jesus. Then someone shouts, "He's coming," and everyone begins to jockey for position to see down the street, palms are waving, and people are shouting, "Hosanna, Hosanna," which means "save us, save us"

The thing is, they aren't talking about being saved in the way we talk about it – a personal salvation from our sinfulness...they are talking about being saved from Rome, being saved from the oppression of Roman occupation, being saved from high taxes and no rights. They

are celebrating because they think Jesus is a new king who will start a war, begin a revolution, take back their country.

The crowd is excited and when Jesus passes, maybe they fall in behind him, thinking maybe he will storm the palace gates? maybe he will head straight to the government buildings? Maybe he will go interrupt the parade of the Roman dignitaries happening on the other side of town? What will he do? How will it begin? And many are bold and courageous enough to follow him, despite the risk.

So, I can imagine the hush that fell when he went instead to the temple – their temple – and just looked around, then left and went to bed. I can imagine the bewildered people picking up their muddy cloaks from the street, now littered with discarded palm branches, and how clusters of people huddled on street corners asking, “What just happened? What does this mean?”

I can imagine it because I’ve seen it before – people disillusioned because Jesus didn’t do what they think he should – Jesus didn’t turn out to be what they wanted him to be. The thing is, we shouldn’t be confused by Jesus because he told us exactly what he was about when he began his earthly ministry, standing in the synagogue and reading:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Yet, people are still disappointed because they found out Jesus wasn’t just for them but was also for their enemy...that Jesus wasn’t just promising them abundance but expecting them to share it with the poor...or set free the captive...or take care of the disadvantaged.

We love the idea of a Jesus who will put our enemies in their place, but we aren’t sure about the Jesus who has the power to do so and instead is content to go to temple and chose the path of peace.

It is no wonder the crowds turn on him so quickly and the cries of Hosanna turned to shouts of crucify him. This isn’t the Jesus they expected, they can let this Jesus go.

That thin little line – that slash we use to describe this Sunday - always jumps out at me...you know, the thin line between Palm and Passion...between parade and sorrow...between peaceful king and hated criminal...that thin line between Hosanna and crucify him. It’s that thin space between our own expectation and God’s expectation...and when those are not aligned, we falter, because we aren’t seeing what we expect to see.

So, a few years ago I became obsessed with another painting called The Wedding Feast at Cana by Paulo Veronese (Ver-on-ace-e). It is a glorious piece of work with about 150 unique characters, all enjoying a feast as Jesus turns water into wine. Stunning. So, I thought, I’m

going to look up where this is and go see it...only to discover that not only is it in the Louvre...but it is in the same room at the Mona Lisa...not only the same room, but it is on the wall facing her...her little 2X3 painting absolutely dwarfed by the 22 by 32 foot Wedding Feast...I had walked right by it, I had been close enough to touch it, I had never even seen it. Why? Because my focus was on what I had anticipated, what I had believed I would see and not on what was actually there in the room with me. By the time I turned from the Mona Lisa, I had my head stuck in a map, looking for somewhere else to be, instead of keeping my eyes peeled for what was right in front of me.

Don't you hate it when you miss something because you've been focused on the wrong thing?

The crowds were anticipating Jesus risking it all to start a revolution – they missed Jesus risking it all for the sake of the marginalized.

The crowds anticipated a king who would save them.

they missed seeing the king who was there to save everyone.

Maybe they missed seeing it for the same reason we do,

because we are too often the ones who feel in need of saving.

Maybe because we can see our own victimhood more easily than we can see the suffering and the marginalization of others.

So, it's easy to miss...the radical, bold, revolutionary thing Jesus is doing, because it isn't the radical, bold, revolutionary thing that was expected. Hosanna...save us...is a cry we know well. We know the cry to be rescued from discomfort and suffering. We know the desire to want things to be better, to want life to be easier. What if Jesus is saying, that's a little 2x3 foot dream...I've got something far more grand in mind...I've got a 22 by 32 foot dream unfolding and you are missing it.

We **want** a savior that will take on the world for us, ride into town and put the evildoers on notice. We **get** a savior that instead **loves** on the world for us, rides into town and puts himself on the line for the sake of the poor, the prisoner, the blind, the oppressed, and the enslaved. He puts himself on the line and has invited us to follow in his footsteps and do the same as he does.

That's the big dream unfolding, that none of this is about us individually, it is about us communally. It isn't about Jesus saving Israel, it is about Jesus emerging from Israel to save the world. It isn't about Jesus taking a stand against Rome, it is about Jesus taking a stand against sin – against being greedy, power-hungry, selfish, nations that oppress and enslave rather than liberate and help thrive. It isn't about Jesus fighting for right in this small, historic moment in time, it is about Jesus fighting for right for all eternity.

Maybe, it's about God showing us how thin that line really is between palm and passion. Maybe God needs us to see how far we've missed the mark, that we will celebrate a political revolution, but crucify the one who comes in love. That we will shout Hosanna to the one who can do something for us, but crucify the one who wants to do something for others.

Maybe in order to save us from ourselves we need to be shown who we really are and what side of the thin line we stand on. Maybe we need to contemplate more deeply what “blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” really means. Because it isn’t a blessing of abundance, it is a blessing of purpose. It isn’t a blessing of ease, but a blessing of obedience. It isn’t a blessing of safety, but a blessing of courage and boldness to love those that the world says don’t matter.

I hope we never make that same mistake, letting go of Jesus because he doesn’t do what we think is right. I hope that we are the few who kept following, who stick with him all the way to the cross and the tomb, even if we are disappointed...because if we do that – if we push on in faith and trust that God’s way is the best and right way – We are in for one heck of a surprise when Easter arrives and we see Jesus didn’t overcome powerful little Rome – Jesus overcame the power of death! the hold of evil! the wages of sin! And that has far greater impact on the world than picking a fight with Rome.

May our trust and hope in Jesus keep us following, even when we don’t understand where we are being led – for God’s way is the way of life, love, and joy.

Let us pray.

Hosanna! Hosanna! Save us, Lord, Save us!

save us from ourselves...from our doubts...from our hesitations to be obedient.

Save us from our misunderstandings...from our sins of omission and commission.

Save us from our arrogance...from our stubbornness...from our wrong expectations.

Hosanna! Hosanna!

We want to be the ones who are blessed to come in your name...

blessed to feel compassion for all people

blessed to have empathy for the needs of others

blessed to be bold and courageous for your vision of peace and life.

May we keep our eyes open to the big picture of your will and may we keep our feet firmly in step with the way of Christ Jesus.

Amen