



Sermon by Pastor Tim O'Brien

April 9, 2017

Gospel Lesson

Luke 22: 34-71; 23:1-25 John 18:33-37

Palm Passion

Everybody loves a parade right? I know in our family one of the highlights of the year is to go back to my hometown of East Troy for the annual 4th of July parade down main street. There is always so much excitement and anticipation as you wait for that first float or band to come strolling down the road. We all love a parade and so why wouldn't the crowds be gathered in the city of Jerusalem. Why wouldn't they be excited. After all Jesus was a popular guy. Huge crowds followed him and no doubt the stories of all the miracles and healings and teachings had preceded Jesus into the city.

And so on this Palm Sunday we remember how as scripture tells us leafy palm branches were spread before him and there were shouts of Hosanna. In shouting Hosanna they were in effect saying "Save us now" Jesus. A wave of religious expectation swept the country.

The symbolism of a ruler riding on a donkey would not have been lost on the crowd as they remembered the words of the prophet Zechariah: an image of a king coming into Jerusalem with shouts of joy from the people. You see, the adoring crowd expected a conquering king who could restore Israel's ancient greatness, throwing off the weight of Roman servitude. However what they got was a humble servant Savior riding a donkey instead of a war horse.

It wasn't just the crowd though that didn't clearly see what was happening. The disciples always seemed out of step with Jesus and never really grasped or clearly saw who this man was that they were following – they seemed to get some of the teaching, healings, but when he talked of dying to save them and us – they were lost. In many ways all those along that parade route were among those who "did not understand these things, Who did not see them clearly at first" (John 12:16).

But Jesus didn't come to Jerusalem to get into any political fights, he didn't come to be a military hero, he didn't come to be what the crowd wanted but instead

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what they needed. Jesus wasn't distracted by the cheering because he knew exactly why he was in Jerusalem. He was there to give his life, for the world. To show what the love of God really looks like as he faced the sin of our world head on. He knew the path he had to walk. And that path led him from the upper room to his betrayal, arrest, scourging, and the cross. You see, the truth is we can't be Easter people until we are first Good Friday people. People who look at themselves in the mirror and are honest in recognizing that we too are at the cross of Jesus.

Practically everyone has known the taste of Palm Sunday, the joy of the parade, the sweetness of success and popularity, and nearly all of us have tasted the bitterness of Good Friday, of failure and rejection. What saves us from an endless round of ups and downs, what frees us from the tyranny of events over which we have no control is our commitment to press forward in trust and hope - in God's love which bring us from Good Friday to Easter morning. And that is why we ask as we hear the passion readings from scripture - were you there - along the parade route, at the betrayal, hearing the jeers, at the cross. Because we are a part of this eternal story. So, let's decide that this week, is going to be different, that we are not going to let the demands of our sometimes hectic lives get in the way of experiencing the power of our living savior in our lives. We are going to try and get a clearer vision as we gather with Jesus in the upper room on Maundy Thursday and at the foot of the cross on Good Friday and at the tomb on Easter. Let's not just watch the parade pass us by but let us step out and follow striving to get a sharper view of Jesus moving in and through our lives. So, were you there? Let us with hope say yes, we were. [Sing Hymn 288 – vs 1 & 4]