



Thoughts on the Journey...

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Who do you think was there among the large crowd that cheered and waved palm branches as Jesus made his entrance into Jerusalem?

Who lined the streets shouting, "Hosanna in the highest"?... Some of the countless people who listened to Jesus teach during his ministry?... Scribes, Chief priests, and elders?... People who had been healed by Jesus?... His apostles, including Judas Iscariot?... Friends and followers?... The streets were swelled with people to joyfully welcome this Jesus who heals the sick, brings sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, hope to the oppressed, and mercy to sinners: Their messiah! Their redeemer! And they shout,

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest."

What a difference a few days makes!

Even as people were waving palms and rejoicing at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the story of betrayal has already begun. The scribes, chief priests, and elders in their jealousy and lust for power, were already plotting to have Jesus arrested. Judas Iscariot, out of greed and selfishness, was looking for the perfect opportunity to profit from the situation. Peter, who ardently proclaimed his love and loyalty to Jesus would soon, out of fear, deny his master three times. The other apostles, who were eyewitnesses to his many miracles, would not even stay awake long enough to pray with Jesus in his hour of need. As the accusations against Jesus began to swirl, where were the many people who were healed, fed, touched with kindness and compassion, loved, and shown mercy by Jesus, during the onset of his persecution? Where were all the people who lined the streets to praise him with palms when it came time for Jesus to walk the road to his death? Why did none of these people come to his defense to give witness to his ministry? Where was their loyalty and commitment to this Prince of Peace?

Everything is so clear and succinct for those of us who were born and raised on this side of the Jesus' death and resurrection story. Right? We have the benefit of knowing that the innocent man who was crucified, was crucified for our sins. Right? He died for the salvation of the human race and conquered death for all of us. Right? He rose from the dead and gave us the gift of everlasting life for those who follow and believe in him.

Right?

But is it really so clear for us? Are we really any different from the players who waved palm branches shouting, "blessed is the king" one minute and then shouting, 'crucify him' the next? Because of who we are, we often lose our way in our humanness. Because we are overcome with fear at times, we lose trust in God who promises to always care for us. We allow the noise of our lives to drown the voice of Jesus who calls us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, show hospitality and kindness to strangers, visit prisoners, care for the sick and dying.

Like the people centuries ago, sometimes we are distracted with the seduction of our secular world and we lose sight of the divine life to which we are called; we lose sight of who we are in relation to God. Let's face it, it is far more comfortable to pull up a couch and a remote to watch a reality show where people are mean to one another, than it is to step outside in the real world working to make positive changes. The love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness that Jesus calls us to, are action words that require work at home, in the community, and the world. Defending our faith and building the kingdom of God is less about talk and more about becoming a living example. The blame for the crucifixion of Jesus has as much to do with our sins of commission as our sins of omission.

During Holy Week, we read the sanitized version of the people and events that contributed to Jesus' death. We say our parts in the Passion story on cue. The words, "Crucify Him!" roll off our lips in sync. We look at ornate crucifixes that don't come close to capturing the horror on that hill of Calvary. We are centuries removed from the noise, the insults, the jeering, the apathy and indifference, and the betrayals that accompanied Jesus on his lonely walk to his death as he carried the weight of his cross as well as the weight of our sins, past, present, and future. The truth is, we cannot wash our hands of guilt. It is our fears, our apathy, our indifference, our lack of love, our sins that as much nailed Jesus to the cross as all those gathered on that first Palm Sunday. And, just as Jesus looked down from his cross of crucifixion and forgave them, he also forgives us. We have a wonderful opportunity to immerse ourselves in the liturgies of Holy Week, fully engaging in our faith, celebrating our salvation, waving the palms of our belief, knowing that we are loved and cared for by our loving merciful Redeemer who lives!