

Working Up a Sweat

It was neither a party nor a parade. There was desperation and determination driving the crowd. The shouts were not shouts of praise; they were prodding, demanding calls of "save us, save us now!"

Some were followers, disciples, others had heard about a potential "savior", a warrior king in the image of King David who would inspire and lead them to overthrow – to throw out – the Romans who occupied and controlled their land, their God-given nation.

The palms were not streamers; they were signs of a military victory, which could only come as the result of a militant uprising. Fighting and death, not faith and love, were the means which led to the awarding of palms. The laying down of cloaks was not a simple gesture of honor; it was a statement of commitment, commitment of the best one had to offer, to a cause and the one who was expected to lead the drive to that cause.

The city was swollen, swollen with those gathering to remember God's leading them to freedom in the past. This remembering stirred the expectation and desire for God to bring that same freedom to them now, right now; to them and to their land. They were entitled – it was their right.

The donkey was not a step up from the walking which was the usual mode of travel for Jesus and his band. There were those who would have had the means and desire to provide this potential warrior with the best of mounts. It was a sign of refusal, refusal to be what the crowd desired, what very well may have been possible in this world, in that day. It was as "in your face" as any word or action that had come from this man, rather those gathered chose to heed the message or not.

It was not fickleness which caused many to change from shouts of "save us" to taunts of "kill him". It was will – the insistence on the personal will, the will that divides others into those who are with us or against us, nothing in between. The will that expects things to go their way and fights against anything that doesn't.

Much has been said, written, attributed to and evolved based upon the last week of Jesus' life. Blame has been placed, hate has been cultivated. Traditions have been formed, symbolizing various meanings and then taking on a life of their own. Some have looked from the surface level celebration of the Palms to the deeply unexpected and confusing events of Easter morning as one big festivity, erasing away the pain and ugliness of the days between by watering down the humanness of Jesus, of any and all involved, and of themselves.

Time is used to distance this story from our stories. Many don't want to see the nature of humanity, the way and will of God, and the effects of our readiness to disregard God when God does not act as

we expect. We want to see those “others” find and accept God as a result of our celebrations, our goodness’s, on how well we clean up; rather than hear that it was after the pain, suffering and death that one of the outsiders proclaimed “this surely was the son of God.” We work so hard to hide our brokenness and often even harder to display our godliness, to do otherwise would require a great something of ourselves.

What might we hear God say if we were to consider those waiving palms and the one called the betrayer as working from the same motivations, the same desires -- That both can and often do come from self will not from surrender. What transformations might the Spirit bring if we acknowledged the ease that comes with going to the tomb only after the resurrection has been proclaimed? Where might this body of Christ move to if we identified our times when we deny as strongly as Peter did, in juxtaposition with those times we proclaim the resurrected Lord?

The garden prayer is often separated from the rousing entry. One seen as the story of people the other the story of Christ. Yet we allege that by the grace of God, we are the body of Christ. Should we identify with both stories, claim and proclaim the shared call to surrender, how might we be changed? What difference would it make to our understanding of God, our expectations and our actions if we embraced those moments when following God means going against our deepest desires – to both ask that the cup pass from us and pledge to let nothing keep us from the drinking of the cup, so that God and God alone shapes our very being.

These long ago, often distorted stories are not just to remind us of what God has done. They are stories to call us forward, forward into “holy week” and forward into lives of deep surrender and confrontation. We know and celebrate, even in the midst of remembering, that God, that goodness, overcomes in the end. Overcomes everything even death. Yet we face the suffering, the injustice, the denial, betrayal. We continue to gather for the bread and cup, yet we are invited hear anew the command to love one another and know that the prayer before the garden, the prayer for those who would experience and then share, is the prayer for us this day.

We come with the knowledge that to live surrendered lives will take the sweating of blood. That to live as God calls will turn our lives and this world upside down. We come knowing that it will create divides with those we might most want to share our lives with and that it will unite us with those we might prefer to view as “others”.

We hear the invitation to journey own not as an invitation to a life of ease but as an invitation to life freely given away, given so completely that in us others see death and resurrection!

And we trust that that is where life truly begins, not with us but with God – God of all ages and God of all creation.