

Palm Sunday
Text: Luke 19:28-42
3-25-18



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“Have you ever been expecting someone--- waiting for someone to arrive--- but you had very few details about what they might look like? Did you already have some pre-conceived notions about their appearance? When they arrived, did they look anything like you had imagined?”

“What do you think were some of the challenges facing people who were awaiting a ‘messiah’, with few details about how he would present himself? Do you think their assumptions about he who would be and how he would make himself known helped or hindered their discovery?”

“What are some of the characteristics of people who are operating out of a sense of passion?”

“Have there been episodes in your life when Jesus seemingly ‘failed to respond’ according to your expectations? Did it challenge you to alter your expectations or your ideas about God?”

Save us now! “Save us from what? [anger; depression; cancer; substance abuse; loneliness; isolation; tension in my marriage and family; fear] How might grace require a different response from you? How might you be able to participate in the restoration without attempting to orchestrate it?”

“How might the futility of your present circumstance give way to hope as you become open to a new God-movement--- a God-entry? How might your perception be limiting what you believe to be possible?”

“From your present vantage point, is it easier to criticize what you see or weep over it? How might you be able to enter it, ‘in the name of the Lord, in order to bring peace?”

Teaching Notes...

This narrative inaugurates what the Christian tradition has identified as “Passion Week”. Webster’s defines “**passion**” as, ‘**a strong inclination that moves the mind and the will to action**’.

At times, Jesus has seemingly downplayed all the attention. He has intentionally suppressed the enthusiasm of those seeking to “*go public*” with his messianic status. Something has shifted. He seems to not only welcome the recognition, but actually incites it.

Honestly, we have never seen Jesus more focused; more determined. These are the “*zealous*” movements of (Isaiah 37:32; Isaiah 9) one who believes himself to be “shouldering the Kingdom” and bringing Israel’s story to a dramatic climax.

He seems to be orchestrating the movements. He tells the religious leaders that what they are witnessing is something of a dramatic and timely cosmic moment which, even if they could silence his followers, creation itself is crying out in recognition and declaration of her rightful King (“*He came to his own...*” John 1)

I think this scene sets us up perfectly for what Christians have referred to for centuries as the “**paschal mystery**”. [Paschal, from “Pascha”, pertaining to Passover]. It requires/involves a movement from a faith that is about a “belief system” to a “way of belief”. It’s a different way of knowing that Paul called “*knowing spiritual things spiritually*” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

The word “*mystery*” does not suggest an inability to understand but an experience that exceeds understanding. It is something that is best described, not defined. In the NT, the Paschal concept includes the Jesus Event: life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the formation of a people who were somehow identified with and identified by this Story.

“Volatile”, is the best way to describe the atmosphere at this time of year. They are heading toward Jerusalem--- the epi-center of religion and politics. Home of the Temple, where heaven and earth intersected. “David’s city”; the place from which Messiah would assume the throne.

The masses were gathering there to celebrate, “**Passover**”. The time when they would gather to rehearse their story of oppression and deliverance from Egypt and the anticipation of another “like Moses” to come and lead a new exodus from Rome (Egypt and Babylon, all over again).

Paradoxically, this is the place where Jesus will not only fulfill the hopes of many but dash the dreams of many whose expectations did not involve a passive and crucified messiah.

As the crowd develops, Jesus decides to finish his journey into town on a donkey; not because he could use the break, but because it was powerful imagery to awaken people to the reality of the moment: the Messianic hope found in Zechariah 9:9.

“Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey -- even on a donkey's colt” (Zechariah 9:9).

The crowd is waving branches (typical of welcoming royalty---a King), but more importantly, they are shouting, **‘Hosanna’**, a Hebrew word meaning *“please save”* or *“save now”*.

This better resembles a mob-scene than a parade. It is the fatigued and frustrated declarations of a people who have run out of ideas and energy and resources. They have proven ready to saddle up the “messiah-du-jour” and ride him all the way into Jerusalem, if it meant some relief.

It is the affirmation that ours is a “messianic” faith.

Our story never permits us to live under the illusion that given enough time, resources, and distance from the God-myth, we can get this thing figured out.

Our motives for pursuing Jesus are not always ‘pure’. They are often more pragmatic than worshipful.

“How many of us responded to the gospel out of a fully developed, air-tight theology which left us feeling as if we had no other choice but to re-think our lives according to Jesus?”

“How many of us came to Jesus because our lives were spiraling out of control and we had no illusions about our ability resolve the tension?”

Admittedly, at times, I’m a bit of “branch-waver”, myself.

I always love it when Jesus starts acting like God! When he *gets in touch with his divine side* and finally determines to address all of the people and issues that are making my life miserable.

Our “ideal” Jesus is the one that evokes our response. I would characterize it as *“being in love with God”* vs. *“being in love with the idea of God”* (e.g. Before I got married, I was in love with the “idea of marriage”.)

But, we can’t follow our ideas about Jesus into Jerusalem because we soon discover that the most detrimental form of idolatry are the false images of God that reduce him to a god of our own making--- one more accommodating and less disruptive. You will eventually come to resent your “ideal Jesus” and find yourself joining in another chant... *“Crucify him!”*

*“If you had only known what would bring you **peace**... but you didn’t recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”*

It appears that sometimes the only way for us to realize the fulfillment of our expectations is to have them shattered in order that we might be available for a better hope.

Our expectations are the reality that we create; the way that we envision life working out for us. It’s never simply the facts, it’s our interpretation of the facts. It is not just the story, but the story we are telling ourselves [e.g. it’s why two siblings can have the same alcoholic parent and yet interpret that fact and walk into distinct futures].

Those expectations often limit us and limit God; they fail to recognize the surprising nature of grace and the unlimited resources of sovereignty.

There is no ‘safe-distance’ with Jesus; only risky non-compliance and illogical self-denial.

Jesus never seemed too intent on ensuring that his followers remain “safely out of harm’s reach”. There is no such thing. In fact, Jesus was emphatic about the notion that the most desirable place was *“with him”*, not sequestered in safety, but in the throes of all that appears chaotic, where his order to could established. In the darkness where light could expose reality; in the midst of circumstances that surpass our understanding so that we might experience *“transcending peace”* [Philippians 4].

The disciples would discover that no amount of dramatic display of the miraculous, no measure of inspiring instruction, could ever evoke the confidence necessary to secure our allegiance to Jesus. Only love could do that.

Jesus offers us this missional model for life...

“Approaching, Observing, Weeping, and Entering”

Approaching- it begins with moving toward the people and into the places from whom/which we might tend to remain distanced.

Observing- it involves prayerful watching and restorative listening.

Weeping- it is joining with the *“groaning of creation and the Spirit”* (Romans 8) at the places of the world’s pain. One of the most often used phrases of Jesus... *“moved with compassion”* (Mark 1:41).

Entering- *“sympathize”* (Hebrews 4:15: “together” + “feel”) The gospel is always incarnational; always gets worked out through the medium of our humanity.