

## A Man on a Mission!

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One of the pitfalls of preaching on Palm Sunday, is getting bogged-down looking back at the religious, political and social dynamics of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel. So this morning, I'm going to skip that part and get right to the point. Today, you and I need to decide how we might welcome Jesus Christ and his message of inclusive love, in the midst of our 21<sup>st</sup> Century religious, political and social dynamics. This is a decision that we must reaffirm and choose to honor every day - especially on those days when we're dealing with a cranky coworker or nasty neighbor, a frustrating family member or any one else who tries our patience or provokes our anger. If you and I choose to welcome Jesus, we will also re-assess the way we interact with people who are poor, oppressed, neglected, or shunned. And we will take to heart Christ's crucial teaching: that whatever we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do it unto him. In other words, a decision to welcome Jesus and to follow his example, should never be taken lightly!

By entering Jerusalem on a humble donkey, and exiting beneath a horrible Cross, Jesus demonstrates that his chosen path goes against the conventional path of human pride, power, and self-protecting caution. He is well aware that the message he proclaims - the Good News of Divine love *for* all people - will not be readily accepted *by* all people. Yet he doesn't change, or back-away from that message. Jesus comes to Jerusalem determined to teach and to show that the abundance of Divine compassion and grace is intended for *all*, and not just a select few.

This puts him at odds with some pretty powerful religious leaders - those "select few" who think that they have the monopoly on Divine righteousness and truth. Additionally, Jesus' passionate advocacy for the poor, tho outcast and the oppressed puts him

directly in the cross-hairs of some rather dangerous Roman officials, who fear that he might be setting the stage for a religious uprising. So, with the disapproval of the religious establishment, and under the watchful eye of the Roman authorities, Jesus rides into town to the welcoming cheers of the crowd. Unfortunately, even the crowd begins to turn against him, as the real purpose of Jesus' mission becomes clear.

Jesus hasn't come to forcibly capture Jerusalem. He comes to graciously captivate people's hearts and lives - to get them to understand and to share his trust in the life-changing power of Divine love, forgiveness, and peace. For many people back then, as well as today, this is an exceptionally difficult thing to do. Freely opening our hearts, giving graciously to others, standing with the poor and powerless can put us in an extremely vulnerable position. A life guided by love and self-giving service carries no guarantee of personal safety or security. In fact, the potential for problems and suffering probably increases; yet so does the potential for genuine joy, purpose, and inner peace.

From the moment he rides down the Mount of Olives, things seem to spiral down-hill spiral for Jesus. His enemies maliciously plot against him; his closest friends betray him, and deny even knowing him; and before the week is over, Jesus is left standing seemingly alone, to face the extreme consequences of his extremely inclusive message of love. Yet he doesn't lose faith; he doesn't give up on the message or the mission. Instead, Jesus continues to trust that the Power of Divine Love and Life will ultimately triumph over the forces of fear, hatred, and even death. On Easter morning, an empty tomb is the glorious sign that Jesus has it right!

It is certainly possible - and popular - to do all within our power to protect ourselves from loss, or harm, or being taken advantage of by others. *Or...you and I can trust in the power of Divine love*

and grace to uphold and sustain us. This doesn't mean that we will escape the pain and loss that Life can bring. However, it does mean is that you and I can live our lives fully, share our lives freely, and embrace the wholeness and holiness of Life which surrounds us every day. You and I, like Jesus, can graciously give our selves for the sake of others - trusting that when we do so, we have done something remarkably good and meaningful and of everlasting value.

When you and I truly believe this, we will gladly welcome Jesus and his wonderful message of Divine compassion, forgiveness and peace. We will also heed his call to welcome, forgive, and embrace others - even when it's really hard to do so. Think of it this way: When you know that someone loves you, supports you, and wants the absolute best for you, it gives you a heightened confidence to take-on the most difficult challenges that Life presents. In a similar way, trusting that the Ultimate Source of all that you are - and all that exists - loves, supports, and wants the best for you, will absolutely heighten your ability to live fully, freely, and joyfully.

In spite of our natural fears and insecurities, you and I can find the courage and inspiration to faithfully follow Christ's path of self-giving service and sacrificial love. And no matter where that path takes us, we do not travel alone. Our Divine Source is with us and within us - sustaining us, connecting us, and assuring us that Light and Life and Love will always rise-up and prevail against darkness, death, and despair. [Next Sunday, we'll take a closer look at how that Rising-Up totally transforms people's lives - I hope you can join us!]