

Just As He Said It Would

Wayne Waibel – 04/10/2022

I wonder if we're not all more than a little tired of the endless doom and gloom that accompanies the evening news. It doesn't seem to matter which network you favor – it's pretty much the same message regardless. I know it's important to keep informed, but does the onslaught of bad news need to be so relentless?

The short answer, of course, is yes – these are the times we now live in. The news is almost exclusively bad, and all indications are it will remain that way on into the foreseeable future. Rest assured – this too shall pass, but not right now, and certainly not without dramatic consequences. And into this global horror we infuse the beginning of Holy Week.

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For those who have seen Mel Gibson's "Passion," you'll understand why Palm Sunday can easily be the single most brutal Sunday in the church calendar as it signals the transformation from triumphant entry to horrific exit. Many of us see past the jubilant cries of "Hosanna!" and slip right into the dreaded "Crucify Him!" We can't help ourselves.

About the only way I am able to throttle back on the anguish of this day is to extend the perspective to the political arena. There is a sort of comfort that washes over me as I replay the events of Palm Sunday comparing the two processions that take place on this day.

Jerusalem is a city of maybe forty thousand people during the first century. With the Jewish festival of Passover being celebrated, its ranks have swelled to upwards of two hundred thousand pilgrims. Anticipating civil unrest with that influx of humanity, a Roman garrison enters the city from the west with Governor Pilate in the lead on his war horse in full armor. They make no pretense about why they have come. It is a very deliberate show of force designed to intimidate and control. This is how Empire operates.

Jesus and His followers enter Jerusalem from the east. He sits atop a lowly donkey, which puts Him just barely above the heads of the throng that accompanies Him. This is Christ's last public appeal to join the kingdom of God. His entry is the complete antithesis of the Roman conquerors. Lordship, especially messianic lordship, is defined in terms of servanthood, gentleness, humility, peacableness, mercy and self-giving acts of generosity and compassion.

This became the dividing moment in history where the Messiah entering from the east would intersect with the empire entering from the west and ultimately – absolutely, and forever change the course of humankind. It's of little wonder that the transformation would be brutal.

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Under the current conditions we find ourselves, it's very easy to parse out the failures of humanity – of our leaders – of our global industries – the list is endless. The situations we are called upon to rise above are many and daunting. It is near impossible for most goal-oriented human beings to separate their actions from their anticipated rewards.

Today's world does not abound in patience, but we're getting a heavy dose of opportunity to exercise patience at this point in time. Some of us will seize upon that and come out the other side of this vindicated and refreshed – others will not.

It's incumbent on each of us, therefore, to extend our very best to those who will struggle. Peace and reconciliation become possible when common folks with uncommon courage oppose exclusionary practices and policies and stand with "the one who comes in the name of the Lord." The only path to true freedom is to choose to serve others.

We view Palm Sunday as a celebration. Many churches begin the service by having their children process in waving palm branches and exclaiming "Hosanna!" I think the reason I have such a hard time viewing that scene as uplifting is because I know that in first century Palestine the same people who shout "Hosanna!" today are going to be even more emphatic later in the week when they cry "Crucify Him!"

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The transformation from “Hosanna!” to “Crucify Him!” – from welcome to rejection – from death to resurrection was all part of God’s plan. At first blush it does not seem fair or even effective, but we do not think as God thinks. His understanding is so far beyond our own that we are left only to marvel at His bold handiwork.

Jesus, who did not seem important and did not seem respectable to the authorities of His day, became, and remains central in the plan and action of God. There is a tendency on our parts as humans, to second guess God. Where was the good news in all of the atrocities associated with the passion of the Christ? Simply put – without the cross, there could be no resurrection, and without the resurrection – no redemption.

As difficult as it is to dwell on the events leading up to our Lord’s sacrifice – they are nonetheless essential components in God’s ultimate and intimate plan for humanity. One is to give thanks not for the good things God gives, but because God is good. His steadfast love endures forever. In the end, the only appropriate response is praise.

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The bible becomes the word of God only in the moment that God speaks to us through it. In that – how does the trial and execution of His Son speak to us, and how are we able even to bear hearing it?

The truth for me is found somewhere in between the story and history of Jesus, and the manifestation of God dwelling among us.

We must hear God's message in our hearts. To do so is to live an abundant life filled with meaning and joy, but not because of what we see. We must value our capacity to hear above our capacity to see. The transformative nature of what we hear is so much more accurate than what we see. The days of burning bushes and pillars of fire are long gone. But the still small voice lingers and informs even today. It quiets the upheaval of yet another empire's inhumanity and reassures that hope abides.

Jesus was simply living out His vocation. And for our part, we need only remember that all things have unfolded just as he said it would. Our Lord spoke truth – in His time – in our time – for all time.

For in the beginning was the word, and that word became flesh and dwelt among us. On this day we acknowledge the triumphal entry of our Lord into the hands of an empire that no longer exists, while He continues to reign in a kingdom that has no end. Amen.