

Focused on His Mission

Palm Sunday. In a normal year we would receive palm branches as we enter the sanctuary. Young children usually parade around the sanctuary as the rest of us sing and wave palm branches from the pews. We all know this is not a normal year. We will be watching the church service on-line from our homes.

The waving of the palm branches emulates the scene of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. "The multitudes" lined the streets, laying palm branches in Jesus' path and waved them in the air. *They shouted "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD (Matthew 21:9)." Hosanna means "save now." The crowd was not looking for a King to take away the sins of the world. Instead, they wanted a potential political leader who would overthrow the Roman government. Jesus had a much bigger purpose than temporary military might.*



Scriptures have recorded the drama of Holy Week. They are not random events that occurred by accident. They were necessary pieces of God's plan for the redemption of mankind. Max Lucado says "Jesus was born to be crucified. Whenever he became conscious of who he was, he became conscious of what he had to do." Lucado said, "This explains the glint of determination on his face as he turned to go to Jerusalem for the last time. He was on his death march." *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51).*

I wonder how I would act if I lived in Jerusalem at the time. As a follower, would I revel in Jesus' popularity as He paraded by adoring fans waving palm branches? Would I be like the disciples who tried to talk Him out of allowing himself to be sacrificed? Or would I run away when the going got tough? No one, except Jesus, understood what was about to happen.

All of the events of that week were important to his mission. On Monday Jesus cursed the fig tree, wept over the city of Jerusalem and cleansed the temple. Tuesday he observed the cursed fig tree had withered. Every day he went to the temple to preach, which angered the Chief Priests and elders, who felt they were losing their authority to the popular Jesus. Jesus continued to heal the sick. Thursday was a roller coaster ride, mostly on a downward spiral. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples before dining with them in the Upper Room, demonstrating the role of a servant. Jesus identified Judas as the one who would betray Him, administered the last supper and then went to the Garden of Gethsemane. There he was arrested and taken to the house of the High Priest, Annas. Friday he was bounced around like a ping pong ball to various trials, appearing before the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod and Pilate again. Those who cheered Him on the road to Jerusalem had turned on him, now chanting to "crucify Him." Beatings followed and Jesus was forced to carry his own cross to Golgatha (Calvary) where He was mocked and nailed to the cross to die. As bad as the events were, they were in fulfillment of prophecies.

Could I have changed the course of these events? God wouldn't want me to. Jesus came to earth to die so that we could live. It had to happen this way. The people at the time did not understand the Jesus death was a victory. *None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Corinthians 2:8).*

As you go about your life this week focus on Jesus' mission. There was a perceived joy on Palm Sunday but it was based on a false vision of Jesus' purpose. The real joy was yet to come, when Jesus would rise from the dead. Churches may be empty on Easter Sunday, but so is the tomb. Jesus had fulfilled God's purpose. *John said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).*

The Bible confirms Jesus' purpose: *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).*

Prayer: Dear Lord. We accept the Passion of the Christ as essential for the saving of our soul. Jesus was born to be crucified and He died so that we can live. We thank you for the gift of eternal life. Amen.