

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer; Amen.

Every year as Palm Sunday approaches, when I think of Jesus and the crowds gathered together in Jerusalem for Passover, welcoming “the king of the Jews” with Palm branches waving in the air and smiling faces in a sea of people watching the scene unfold before them, my mind always takes me back to the most amazing parade I’ve ever experienced; Disney’s Main Street Electric Parade. This magical parade was what I remember most about my trips to Disney as a child. Each night as the sun faded into the sky thousands of people would line the walkways and wait in anticipation of the night light parade as I called it. Once the parade began there was float after float filled with sparkling lights and iconic Disney movie characters aboard waving and smiling at the crowds. People cheered as they spotted their favorite characters; I personally was always on the lookout for Cinderella or Ariel from the Little Mermaid. And as each float approached, they were synchronized with a special soundtrack to enhance the magic of the scene appearing before you. It sure was something, something absolutely magical. You could see the hope and joy on the faces of each child staring in disbelief and wonder, especially as the parade ended with Mickey and Minnie in the grand finale.

I can’t help but wonder if the scene on the streets of Bethpage and Bethany, as Jesus approached the city of Jerusalem, was similar to the excitement of the electric parade. I remember as a young child wondering which star would be the next to arrive and what their float would look like. I remember being amazed at Dumbo flying high above the crowd. I remember Cinderella and her prince and their sparkling carriage. I remember being awe struck and full of amazement. And as we think of Jesus riding on a donkey and being welcomed by the crowds, I can’t help but wonder if that’s how people felt about Jesus; anticipating his arrival and

wondering if they were filled with wonder at his sheer presence. I wonder if they were thinking about what would happen next, and who was this guy, the reason for the parade? And I can't help but wonder if they saw Jesus as the grand finale, the star of the show.

This year as part of my Lenten discipline I have been reading a daily devotion entitled, "The 40 voices of Lent." In the book one of the devotions was about our text for this morning, the text for Palm Sunday. In this particular day's lesson, the author shares her experience as she was visiting the Holy Land and taking the same path that Jesus took on that first Palm Sunday. Now I don't know about you, but when I hear the story of Jesus riding on a donkey and heading into the city of Jerusalem where he will be welcomed like a king, I picture the parade going kind of like every other parade I've watched or been a part of in my life. I see a nice flat long road filled with people patiently sitting on the sidewalk waiting for the show to happen, the scene to unfold right before them. But the way the author describes the scene was anything but the picture I had in my head.

She writes, "The terrain loomed higher than I imagined. We walked the cobbled road and tilted unexpectedly in an extreme incline towards the Holy City. I always envisioned the Palm Sunday path flat or perhaps with a slight incline. I never anticipated this sharp angled road with a steep gradient. The sheer incline of our descent on that road shouted a new insight to Jesus' last week. Our pace quickened as we walked down and I wondered how that little donkey kept his footing with Jesus riding on his back as people waved their palm leaves. One of our fellow travelers lost control of her steps. She walked faster and faster down the slope. We grabbed her arm to slow her down before she could fall. She was so relieved someone caught her and helped her stop before something tragic happened."

I wonder if Jesus had the same experience. I wonder if as he traveled down the steep hill towards his impending death he, like that woman, looked out into the crowds of people and wondered who was going to help him? Who could he depend on to save him from the events that were certainly about to unfold right in front of him? I wonder if he knew that one of his own, Judas, was about to betray him. I wonder if he knew that his beloved Peter was about to deny him. I wonder if he knew he was headed towards his own crucifixion alone? And as I was thinking about all of these things, I couldn't help but wonder what my role would have been if I was present for that first Palm Sunday. What would I have been doing? Would I have been like Judas or Peter and turned my back on the Messiah? Would I have been a person in the crowd quick to welcome Jesus as king into town, throwing palm branches and flowers and streamers, and then just as quickly turn my back on him and join the crowd chanting "Crucify him!" Would I have been one of the women sitting at the foot of the cross heartbroken at the pain and agony Jesus was going through afraid to lose my Messiah? Would I have been a centurion, a Roman guard, charged with making sure Jesus indeed would die because of the fear of the authorities? What role would I have played? What would my part of Jesus' crucifixion would have been mine? And you, where would you have been? Because we all were there in some shape and form.

As a pastor I'm well aware that Holy Week isn't for everyone. I know and understand that you are busy people, tired with the demands our lives have placed upon us. But this week, Holy Week is filled with emotions. Today we are joyful. Easter Sunday we are joyful. But it is important to remember that the resurrection isn't just about joy. It's about a man, sent from God by God into a broken world; a man who was obedient in this life to the will of God, unlike any other human being. A man who was willing to sacrifice himself, his own life, for the sake of

good people and bad people and questionable people. A man who voluntarily was crucified, the most gruesome and humiliating form of death, because of his love for all people. I know Maundy Thursday and Good Friday aren't fun. They aren't supposed to be. It's important to remember that you cannot have resurrection without death. Death has to happen before Jesus can be raised from the dead for the sake of the world. Death had to occur before we can receive the promise of new life and new creation and new bodies, worshipping God for all of eternity. So come, come and bear witness to the shame, humiliation and death of the son of God. Come and claim the part you had in his death, so you can hear the promise that as Jesus was raised from the dead you too have been promised in the waters of baptism that you too will be raised.

Jesus did all the work. Our job is to be a witness. Witness the happiness of Palm Sunday, the disappointment and hope and Maundy Thursday, the devastation of Good Friday, and the joyous news at the tomb on Easter morning. Come and see the darkness and the light that shines in the midst of it, the light no darkness can overcome. Come and see. Come and bear witness, so that we can go out boldly proclaiming the awesome deeds and promises of God. Amen.