

The Pinnacle of His Passion  
Palm Sunday C

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Luke 19:38

With the signs of his kingship waved in the air the crowds in Jerusalem shout their acclaim of their hero and their hope: Jesus of Nazareth. Yet Jesus entry into Jerusalem is conspicuous for a king. Most kings don't ride on donkeys. And most popular leaders as Jesus was would have been more cautious about being called “a king.” Nevertheless Jesus allows it. Despite his detractors calling for him to stop the shouting from the crowd, Jesus tells them that the stones would cry out in their place.

“The Jesus train is rolling! It's coming to your town. But when the prophet makes his bid will shouts of glory be found? He's coming down that royal path to make his gospel known. What they don't yet realize is this whistle-stop derails that rolling stone.”

Jesus journey of a passionate life climaxes the greatest story ever told. Today, at the height of his passion his career will come to a screeching halt – because without followers political or religious a prophet is finished. And if this prophet was not welcome in his hometown why would we suspect it would be any different when Jesus again refuses to be the man they wanted him to be. Prophet, priest and king – they want their religious and political leaders to do it all for them. They say, “A nice neat package is what we ordered.” The crowd wants to keep it simple. In today's world people want a religion where they can just add water, shake or stir. They want religion when it is convenient and fits their crowded schedule. And the crowd says, “Leave my conscience alone.” And a virtual faith is far less intrusive than one that asks for commitment.

Every six months to a year ministers and priests are evaluated on their performance. This prophet of Nazareth now gets his. How will you and I rate him thus far? Let's look at his performance based on today's readings!

He enters Jerusalem knowing his enemies are out to get him! He upsets his religious opponents by allowing praise of him worthy of a king! He has the audacity to take a donkey based on his credit as “the Lord has need of it.” Does the owner ever get it back?

During the Passion Reading of Luke's gospel Jesus calls a prayer meeting in a garden. He is now at his greatest passion and

anguish because his time has come. His enemies are a few hundred yards away yet he endangers the lives of his disciples. Surely he realizes that his men will put up a fight? Surely Jesus realizes that his disciples will be put into a position to save their own skin and will abandon him. Jesus, “Why did you not choose the path of least resistance?” “Look at the people who got hurt – even the high priest’s slave?”

And then there was the Inquisition at the High priest’s council and the Judgment seat of Pilate. Jesus would not give them a straight answer. What if disrespect for their authority? Were his replies such because they would not accept him as their king?

Would people follow a man with such answers? In reply to questions of his identity he said, “If I tell you, you will not believe me; and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” “You say that I am.” “You say so.”

He had no defense. He had no clear answers. He had no witnesses on his behalf. The prophet, priest and king let his enemies defeat him by the weapon of disbelief. How powerful a weapon it was! And it worked!

In the end of his short career Jesus finished last as far as evaluations go. Where was God’s kingdom now? Where was the good news that this kingdom of justice and righteousness was near? The teaching on God’s love, the miracles of transformed lives, the feeding of the hungry and poor – where were the thousands that followed?

If I had Jesus evaluation I might be working at Menards. From an earthly point of view his passionate life ran out of steam! What a disappointment! If you and I knew nothing more of what was written for us on this day chances are we would have stopped the train and gotten off. “Forget Jesus,” the crowds would say. “He was just another shooting star that lit the sky for a moment.”

The crowds are fickle. They want their prophets to be everything and they want answers they don’t deserve. “Forget Jesus,” they say. “Another Savior will surely come along...someday...maybe.”

To the crowd who will not have heard this Passion reading, nor some sermon on it, I say, “How could you!” “How could you forget him?” AMEN