

“Knowing God’s Way”

March 29, 2015

The God We Can Know series – Palm Sunday

Jesus’ life and ministry lead to his entry into Jerusalem. He came to the cheers of people gathered there. Some scholars estimate that there were as many as 200,000 people who came to celebrate Passover. Imagine if you were among those 200,000 coming into the city with expectations for the celebration of Passover - for what might happen in your life, coming to the Temple, coming with your prayers and hopes for what God would do. I’m sure it was chaotic, loud, and filled with excitement.

Everything leads to the fact that Jesus is Messiah - the One they have been waiting for, and yet God’s salvation will come in a way that they don’t expect. They want a winner. Those who gathered were waiting and wanting a Messiah to save them from Roman occupation. They wanted someone to get the job done - and fast!

In the Old Testament book of Zechariah, chapter 9, there's a prediction concerning the world's one true king and how he would make himself known: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is his way of saying, "I'm the One you've been waiting for." He doesn't come on a war horse, but in this humble way.

When they raised palm branches in the air and sang “Hosanna!” it was a sign of triumph and victory. “Hosanna” is a Hebrew word that means “Help us” and “Save” with a sense of anticipation that God will act soon! They believed that Jesus was Messiah, but it turns out that he’s not the one they expect - or maybe even want!

And if the crowd in Jerusalem is struggling, how much more would Jesus’ closest followers be struggling? A few days after the celebration in Jerusalem, Jesus says to his friends, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” He tells them to believe - to trust - in him. All that he says is meant to offer comfort to troubled hearts – both there was confusion and uncertainty - even as they heard these incredible promises.

God has a place for each one of us. You know the way; I am that way. You have seen the Father; whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Jesus tells them who he is. He is God in the flesh. If you know me, you know my Father. This is big stuff.

Jesus speaks to his disciples as he is preparing them for the time when he will not be with them in physical presence. This is his going away speech to the disciples. It’s his promise that he will never leave them because he lives in them now and will come again.

Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, the life. If you’ve seen me, then you’ve seen God fully. And you can share in this relationship between God and me.” There’s some depth here -

be in relationship with me. Stay in relationship with me. This isn't Jesus arguing about religion, but offering comfort, connection and reassurance for those he loved dearly.

Imagine what the disciples faced: a world where they were supposed to take what Jesus had taught them and shown them and make it real for others through their words and actions. It was a ministry of love, compassion, hope, and mercy. All this they faced with the promise of Jesus to give them what they needed to accomplish God's work.

But they made Jesus their way - their pattern for living. First, they were connected in a small community. Our personal relationship with God is nurtured in community. We learn and grow together. Second, they developed practices like prayer that deepened their connection to God and each other. They learned from Jesus that sacrifice was a vital part of trusting him and following him. They experienced his death firsthand. Finally, they learned compassion and lived compassion.

Friends, the promise hasn't changed. Jesus lives in us when we talk and walk what he said and did. Being together in community, spiritual disciplines, sacrifice, compassion - all of them are a part of making Jesus our Way. Take the time to read the witness that people have offered on these papers that have become our Way for Holy Week. There are words from kids about how God helped them make new friends, witness from those who have felt God's presence in moments of light, God's provision for their family as they were separated by miles, appreciation for the beauty of God's creation, and thanksgiving for God's grace in family, friends, church and community.

But making Jesus our Way is a challenge every day. Just like those who welcomed him into Jerusalem with shouts of "Hosanna!" and joy, they soon learned that his way wasn't all that they expected. Still we struggle. Still we wonder and we question. Still we rejoice. All of what we bring to God - we come to God as we are - and God receives us. Those friends of Jesus who received his words of comfort still didn't understand it fully - what he was saying and how he was the One they'd waited for. And yet he loved them.

If we want to really celebrate who Jesus is, we can't skip from "Hosanna!" to "Hallelujah!" We can't just sit on either side of Holy Week; we have to go through it. Some of us feel like we're there now - struggling, facing illness, grieving losses. And it's real. It's deep, and it's hard. Jesus is the Way - to peace, freedom, joy, and hope. But his path is one of love that goes to the end for you, me, and the whole world.

As we live into this week, as we gather to remember how Jesus lived and died, as we consider God's great love, we have an opportunity to make Jesus our way. Yes, maybe he's been your Lord and Savior for a long time. Maybe you've been thinking about what it means to follow him and let him lead as your Way. Maybe you're ready to make a commitment - to make Jesus your way, to seek his truth, and to accept the gift of eternal life in him - to open your heart and let him in.

May we make Jesus our way. Thanks be to God. AMEN.