

## Putting Ourselves in Harm's Way

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For Jesus, the day we now call Palm Sunday is a day of mixed emotions. He knows that getting *into* Jerusalem will be relatively easy; yet he also knows that getting *out* of Jerusalem may prove to be deadly. He rides triumphantly into town on a humble donkey, with the cheers of the people ringing in his ears; but he leaves staggering under the weight of a heavy cross, with shouts of scorn heaped upon his head. In less than a week, Jesus goes from being hailed as the heir-apparent to the throne of David, to being mocked as the "King of the Jews" - complete with a crown of thorns.

This morning, I'd like us to consider what happens, to so drastically change Jesus' reception. We do so, not to look backward at the religious and political forces at work in First Century Israel, but to look inward at the spiritual and psychological forces at work in our own lives today. So, as we look at the dynamics of that first Palm Sunday and Holy Week, let's also examine what's going on with us on *this* Palm Sunday. Do you and I *truly* welcome Jesus and his message of inclusive compassion, or do we quickly change our tune when Christ's call to forgiveness interferes with our own self-righteous anger? Are we willing to hold true to Christ's compassionate call, regardless of the cost; or do our own insecurities and fears keep us from following Christ's path of sacrificial love? Like those ancient Israelites, you and I can wave our palm branches and sing Christ's praise today, but what about tomorrow - when we're back to dealing with that cranky coworker or nasty neighbor - that frustrating family member or infuriating political hypocrite? How about when we're faced with the hard choice of helping a stranger, or helping ourselves?

Christ's journey to the Cross clearly shows us that following Jesus takes us on a path that goes against the grain of self-indulgence and self-protective cautiousness. It signifies a total commitment to the Divine Way of compassion and forgiveness, self-sacrifice and love. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem, he's certainly aware that the message he proclaims - the Good News of Divine love for *all* people - will not be readily accepted *by* all people. Yet he doesn't change the message. He is resolved to declare and to show that Divine love and grace is for *all* - not just those who are like us; not just those who we like; not just a special, select group.

This puts Jesus at odds with the religious establishment - that "select group" who think that they have a monopoly on Divine righteousness and truth. Additionally, Jesus strongly advocates for the poor and the oppressed, which puts him at odds with the occupying forces of Rome, who suspect that he might be setting the stage for a religious uprising. So, with the disapproval of the religious leaders, and under the watchful eye of the Roman authorities, Jesus rides into town to the cheers and hosannas of the crowd. Yet as the week progresses, and he *doesn't* move to overthrow the Roman oppressors, Jesus begins to experience a growing sense of disappointment from the crowd itself.

As the week between Palm Sunday and Good Friday progresses, the real purpose of Jesus' visit to Jerusalem becomes clearer to all. He hasn't come to take the city by force; he has come to capture the voluntary allegiance of people's hearts and minds - to help them to experience, and to trust in God's loving care for them, and for everyone else. I believe that this is what gets Jesus in trouble with the religious and political powers; and why he loses the support of the general population: his *insistence* on following the Divine Way of compassion, forgiveness, and peace. Yet I also believe that this is how Jesus reveals himself to be the Christ - the Holy One's Anointed Messiah and Authentic Messenger.

Because he is willing to let go of any egocentric need to promote or protect himself, Jesus is truly free to hold firmly to the promise of Divine Love and Grace. And because he trusts that his life, and the lives of all those around him, are eternally linked to our One Divine Source, Jesus faithfully follows-through on his mission. He will not be intimidated by the religious or political power-brokers who seek to silence his message. Nor will he be discouraged by the fickleness of the crowd, who cheer him one day and condemn him the next. Jesus' undying faith in the never-ending nature of Divine Love allows him to move faithfully and fearlessly forward, in spite of the dangers that surround him.

On a life-journey guided by self-giving love, there are certainly no guarantees of safety or security. In fact, the potential for problems and pain probably increases; yet so does the possibility of genuine joy, purpose and inner peace. In spite of the fact that things seem to unravel for Jesus, he doesn't lose faith; he doesn't give-up on the mission or the message. Instead, he trusts that the Power of Divine Love and Grace will ultimately triumph over the forces of hatred, fear and even death. Easter morning is the glorious sign that *Jesus has it right!*

It is certainly possible - and popular - to do all that we can to protect ourselves from harm, or loss, or being taken advantage of by others. *Or*, we can trust in the love and care of our One Divine Source. This doesn't mean that we will escape the pain or losses that Life brings. What it does mean is that you and I can live our lives fully, share our lives freely, and embrace the wholeness and holiness of Life all around us. And perhaps most importantly, you and I, like Jesus, can graciously live our lives - and give our lives - for the sake of others - trusting that there is nothing that can ever separate us from God's Love. When you and I *truly* believe this, we will joyfully welcome Jesus and his message of inclusive compassion. We will consistently heed his call to forgiveness, especially when it's hard to do so. And in spite of our fears and insecurities, you and I will find the courage and inspiration to faithfully follow Christ's path of service and sacrificial love - trusting that wherever that path takes us, the Holy One is with us every step of the way.