

“Eat, Drink, and Be Merry, for Tomorrow....”

Matthew 21: 1-11, 17; 1 Corinthians 15: 30-34

It is Palm Sunday, a day of celebration, a day of excitement, a day to rejoice and shout Hosanna! We look forward to Palm Sunday. It really is a great and fun day! But I will share, that all week, I have not been feeling it. Sure, I guess you could say, that the Big Loss didn't help my mood this week but I think my being melancholy had to do with something more, something that I didn't want to face, something that I didn't want to admit, even to myself. I really think my being melancholy had something to do with the moments after Jesus entered Jerusalem, and not the big party that happened before.

Let me explain: All week, I have kept coming back to this text, over and over again but I felt like I wasn't getting the whole story. Sure, Matthew does a great job, giving us the details. He even goes overboard, saying that Jesus is riding on both a donkey and a colt, just so we don't miss the Messianic nuances, but something is missing, even in Matthew's detail laden retelling of this story.

I tried telling myself that I was overanalyzing this text. I told myself to just suck it up and enjoy the party! Enjoy the celebration. Be in the moment! Eat, Drink and Be Merry! It's Palm Sunday, for gosh sake's. Celebrate! Enjoy!

I know I should have been able to do all those things but...but unfortunately I also know the rest of this story. And I also know the quote, “Eat, Drink and Be Merry” doesn’t end at this point. It continues on. As humans, we tend to put a period after the word “merry” but in reality, there’s a comma instead, comma followed by the statement “For Tomorrow We Die”.

Now I will tell you all week, I have tried fooling myself into thinking that this statement is so appropriate for the beginning of Holy Week. It captures the joy at the beginning and then brings us back to reality at the end. We can celebrate today and then remember later on that Jesus died. Really good theological stuff...

But that sermon just wouldn’t write! Later, I realized the flaw in my thinking was because the quote doesn’t say, “Eat, Drink and Be Merry for tomorrow Jesus dies. It clearly says “Eat, Drink, and Be Merry, for tomorrow we die.” For tomorrow we die.

I know right! Puts a whole big damper on the Party! Leave it to the preacher to remind us of our mortality.

It’s Palm Sunday! No one wants to think about that! We just want to party! We just want to celebrate! We just want to eat, drink and be merry! Preacher, Can’t we just stop right there? Can’t we just stay in the moment, in this joyful frame of mind? Do we really have to finish saying the complete quote? Can’t we just

change the punctuation and end the quote on our terms? Can't we just forget about the darkness that awaits us at the end of that quote? Can't we just stay and be the life of the party forever?

And the answer to that question is no. We can't stay in the party mood forever. We can't ignore the darkness. We can't pretend our Palm Sunday celebrations end on our terms and not the world's. We can't ignore what awaits Jesus, what awaits us behind the gates of Jerusalem.

As people of faith, as much as we want to, we can't prevent the things of this week from happening. We must complete the journey. We must ride through the gates. As people of faith, We must finish out the week, just like Jesus did. As much as we want to change things, this week will move beyond the celebrations into the darkness and we ignore that fact. We cannot eat, drink and be merry all the time. Sometimes we have to face reality. We have to face a reality that tells us that every party must come to an end, a reality that tells us we have to enter the gates and complete our journey to the cross.

I think that's what has been bugging me all week about this text. It won't just let us stay in the celebration. Jesus rides on. Jesus continues. Jesus keeps on going alone while the rest of us, sit outside the city walls, with smashed palm branches and dirty cloaks. I think it has bugged me all week that Jesus just won't

stay and be the Jesus that I want him to be. He has to make things difficult. He forces the party to end. By riding on through the gates of Jerusalem, Jesus forces us to realize that being his disciple is not all good times and celebrations. There are also harsh expectations as well. There are difficult realities we have to face. There are things that come with being Jesus' disciples that make us want to shout to Jesus: We didn't sign up for all of this!"

I think it has bugged me all week that Jesus just won't stay and party and be the fun-loving, bread-breading, good times Jesus that we all know and love. He has to go and change things and remind us that this trip to Jerusalem is not a home-coming celebration but a statement about his true nature and calling as the Son of God.

I think that is what has bugged me all week. As I read this joyful exciting text, I also had a reluctance to face the truth, the truth about the disciples, the truth about myself, the truth about what it really means to be a person of faith. It is not, nor has it ever been just about playing it safe, or eating, drinking and being merry all the while ignoring reality.

This triumph ride into Jerusalem is about the coming of the Kingdom of God and forces us to ask ourselves the hard questions. As disciples of Jesus it is so much easier when Jesus does what we expect him to do. It really is great and life-

giving to say I know that Jesus loves me but we don't want the party to end. We want to stay and keep celebrating. We don't want to face the darkness that reality holds for us. Life is so much simpler if it is just about the good times.

But Jesus doesn't stop in the middle of the celebration. He doesn't pause so that the crowds can gather around him. He doesn't ignore what awaits him in Jerusalem. He keeps on going.

And we are left with smashed palm branches, dirty cloaks, and a stark reality as we watch Jesus ride on into Jerusalem alone. We go from having this huge big crowd to just one lone rider, making his way to the Temple, making his way out the city, making his way to the cross.

Where did the celebration go? Why didn't the party follow Jesus into the gates? Why didn't the crowd have the courage to proclaim within the city walls that its Messiah was here? They did it on the outside. They had no problem, shouting Hosanna to all who would listen but as soon as they crossed into the gates, the celebration quieted. The crowd's responses changed. No longer was it Blessed who came in the name of the Lord. It was now, "Oh you know, it is just that prophet Jesus from Nazareth."

Oh yes, I know the excuse, the crowd was fickle. It is easy to sit back some two thousand years and say I would have been different. I would have stood by

Jesus. I wouldn't have been like all this other disciples who just wanted Jesus to remain outside of those walls, and be the life of the party. I would have walked courageously with Jesus through those gates, thumbing my nose at the powers that be. I would have been the one Jesus could have relied on except...

Except when I remember all those times along my faith journey when I have not done so.

As Jesus walks on alone, I think about all the times I remained quiet when I was called to speak out on behalf of my brothers and sisters in faith. As Jesus walks on alone, I think about all the times I turned away from my brothers and sisters in faith because their reality was too harsh for me to acknowledge. As Jesus walks on alone, I think about all the times when my joyful praises of my Lord and Savior changed to a subdued acknowledgment of just this prophet I know. As Jesus walks on alone, I think about all the times I stayed at the party and ignored my calling as Jesus's disciple.

Sure I can say the crowd is fickle all I want but I have to acknowledge that I am right there among them, with smashed palm branches and dirty cloaks, watching Jesus walk into the city alone.

As people of faith it would be so much easier for us if Jesus would just stay and be the life of the party. It would be so much easier for us to follow Jesus if he

would just be the Jesus we want him to be: fun-loving, bread-breaking, giving new life Kind of Savior but, no he has to go and change all that by forcing us to face our own mortality, by forcing us to make some hard decisions, by forcing us to decide if we are going to follow him through those gates, knowing what awaits us ahead.

No longer can we just be party. No longer can we just ignore the hurting around us. Now is the time for us to get to work. Now is time for us to follow Jesus to the cross.

As people of faith, as much as we want to change it, the reality for us as Jesus' disciples is that it would be so much easier if Jesus would just stay and party with us but he doesn't. He keeps on going. And now he is asking us if we are going to come along.

Sure, I would like to think that when the time comes, I would have the courage and strength to follow but I am realizing that that may not be the case. Because regardless of the crowd celebrations, regardless of what I think I would do, when the time actually comes, we see that Jesus rides alone through those gates. We see that Jesus rides alone out of the city. And we see that Jesus walks alone to the cross.

We know how the story ends. We know how the quote ends. The only question is do we have the courage to follow our Lord and Savior and face what awaits us ahead?

Now I know this is not the jubilant uplifting Palm Sunday message that we were all expecting today and I can't blame for being a little depressed.

But as I said before, we know how the story ends. So I leave you with these words from Paul. May they bring us courage and strength to leave the party and follow Jesus wherever he may go.

A Reading from 1 Corinthians 15:

why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? ³¹ I die every day! That is as certain, brothers and sisters, ^a as my boasting of you—a boast that I make in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised,

“Let us eat and drink,
for tomorrow we die.”

³³ Do not be deceived: Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God.

Amen.