

Jesus: The Man for All People
Palm Sunday
Rev. Jonathan Cornell
4-13-14

This morning as we entered into worshipping God together, we waved palm branches. People have done this for nearly 2000 years; we do it to commemorate the day when Jesus came into Jerusalem with his disciples. On that remarkable day, everyone around him was saying, “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” As the people were saying this, they were quoting Psalm 118:26. But it’s in the previous verse that where we get this word Hosanna. Our English word “hosanna” comes from a Hebrew phrase *hoshiya na*. And that Hebrew phrase is found in one solitary place in the whole Old Testament, **Psalm 118:25**, where it says, “Lord save us, Lord grant us success.” In Hebrew, hosanna literally means “Save, please!” It is a cry for help.

Walking into Jerusalem that day, Jesus was surrounded by people looking for a savior, they were looking for a liberator, they were looking for an answer. Jesus was coming to turn the tables. But their sights were set on overturning the seat of power, ushering in a new era of Jewish prosperity. Help, save us, save us from Rome, save us from Cesar, save us from Herod.

Jesus had a very different perspective. You see, Jesus knew. Jesus knew that while they were thinking today that he was the greatest guy in the world, by the end of the week they would hate him, they’d be yelling “crucify him.” Because Jesus knew, Jesus had a different perspective. Jesus knew that the greatest thing standing between these people and the life they were built to live was not Rome, it wasn’t Herod and his tax collecting cronies, it wasn’t their waistline, their 401k or that new car, either. You see, the thing standing between the people and the life they were created for was the people themselves.

Sometimes, we think that if we can just get the right job or the right car or belong to the country club or earn the right academic degrees that our life will be different. We think that the answer lies in what’s on the outside. It’s not. There’s not enough scholastic degrees, enough job promotions, there aren’t enough cars or houses, or there aren’t enough hours in the day to spend in the gym, or enough botox in the world to fix what’s wrong with us.

Because we’re looking from the wrong perspective.

The Guardian newspaper in London a few years back ran a television ad that depicted the same event from three different perspectives. It began with a skinhead person, all tattooed up, with piercings and leather—a very menacing character—running down the street. When all of a sudden, he shoves a well-dressed businessman, knocking him to the ground. Your immediate reaction is that this is clearly a mugging, and the businessman is about to be robbed by the skinhead.

The second perspective is from a wider angle in which a big black SUV pulls up and out of the car jump three men right behind the skinhead. Then you see the skinhead take off running, and it

appears as if he's making an escape from the men. Then he collides with the man in the suit. So from this perspective, one might think he is running from some people who are after him.

However, the third perspective of the scene is from above, and here the whole scenario comes into razor-sharp clarity. You see a huge crane moving back and forth in a very unsafe manner, and dangling from the crane is a giant safe, the kind you would find in a bank. And just as the harness is about to give way, you see the skinhead man hurl himself towards the man in the suit, who happens to be standing directly under the safe. As the harness gives way, you see the unsuspecting businessman saved by a very unorthodox character.

The ad closes with the statement, "Our newspaper gives you the right perspective."

What Jesus saw as he looked in the eyes of the people who lined the streets that day was all the yearning for real life, mixed with the inability to actually know how to get it. He looked into their eyes and saw misplaced trust, misappropriated hope, and even though they didn't have a clue what it was all about, Jesus still said to the Father, "We'll go there anyway. Father, they don't know what they're doing to one another, but perhaps this will get their attention." So he rode that common, unremarkable animal into Jerusalem. What he saw in front of him—beyond the faces—was the answer, the greatest expression of love he could offer: himself on the Cross of Calvary. Jesus' choice to substitute his own life for yours and mine was the wake up call to us. The way you find life is in giving yours up for another. John 15 says greater love has no other than one who gives up his life for his friends. You are my friends...if you do this.

One of my favorite authors is a Catholic Priest named Brennan Manning. Manning was born Richard Francis Xavier Manning. And when he was in his early 20s, he and his best friend Ray joined the Army and served in Korea together. One day while they were sitting in a fox hole together eating Snickers candy bars and chatting about what they were going to do when they got back to Brooklyn, a grenade flew into the foxhole, landing right between them. Ray looked at his friend, and with a wink tossed the candy bar aside, grabbed his helmet, jumped onto the live grenade, and was subsequently blown to smithereens.

Years later, he went to visit Ray's mother in Brooklyn. They sat up late one night having tea when he asked her, "Do you think Ray loved me?" Ray's mom got up off the couch, shook her finger in front of his face, and shouted, "Jesus Christ—what more could he have done for you?!" Not long after, he took his vows and became a priest. He was instructed to take up the name of a Saint, and immediately he thought of his friend Ray Brennan. From then on, he would be known to many as Brennan Manning.

On that day, if you were the only one standing by the side of the road, heck, if you were the only person who ever lived, Jesus would have rode to Calvary for you. God came into the world to show us how much he loves us, and he's about to walk to the cross because he loves us. If you are thinking to yourself this morning, "My life really isn't where I hoped it would be. I wish there was someone who loved me," imagine Ray's mother saying to you, "Jesus Christ—what more could he have done for you?" You are loved, because Jesus loves you.

Today, may we see life from the right perspective. Amen.