

The Mind of Christ©

Philippians 2:1-11; Luke 23

March 24, 2013

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PALM SUNDAY

I hear the Scripture of the Palms, where Jesus gets on the colt of a donkey and heads to Jerusalem ... his last ride into the holy city. At one place the Scripture says Jesus “set his face like flint” as he looked at Jerusalem.

I’m pretty sure it isn’t referring to Flint, MI., but that Jesus’ face had that stony, hard-set look to it ... like a flint rock. He was ready to accomplish what he was set out to do.

I can picture him and the donkey stopping up on a hill, just before riding down and entering the city. I seriously doubt the donkey was thinking too much, although we can’t know that for sure.

But Jesus surely had many thoughts going through his mind as he prepared for what was going to happen. Even though the people were excited and waved palm branches at Jesus – the main attraction to this little parade – Jesus knew that it would all turn around – that they would, many of them, have a change of heart before the week was over.

You can’t blame them for their hope and their excitement, for anticipating what Jesus was going to do and be! Many of them had seen, or heard about the last big thing Jesus had done – which was to raise his friend, Lazarus, from death to life. That’s huge!

If he could do that, along with all the healings and cleansing from demons and leprosy; if he could cause the lame to walk and the blind to see; if he could feed five thousand people with a few fish and loaves of bread; and if he could forgive sins as he had said – surely great things were about to happen!

He must be the Messiah! He must be the one sent from God to overthrow the Romans and to take the throne and rule as their beloved King David had done so long ago.

You can’t blame them. They were oppressed; they were poor; they were excited to see Jesus and they were anticipating what was coming next!

How do think Jesus felt as he rode through the city? Can you, for even a moment, have an inkling of what was going through his mind? Here were people showing him adoration and praise with waving palms and laying their coats down on the road for him as if he were a king.

Here were people shouting “Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Jesus was a man of great passion and love – otherwise he would never have done what he did, I think. So, do you think he was full of love for those people? Do you think his heart was aching to see them and to know they were so right, yet so wrong?

Not only would they turn against him, but their hopes would be dashed and their disappointment would be great when he did not do anything to stop his crucifixion.

I think Jesus' heart must have been breaking! Because he knew the emotional roller coaster they were on and he knew how their joyful Hosanna's would change to angry shouts of "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Throughout this week we know as Holy Week, we Christians will be thinking and reflecting on the passion of Christ. The palms were but a momentary celebration (although deserving, of course) of the King that Jesus would be eventually.

But it would take a lot more than riding through the streets of Jerusalem on a donkey for Jesus work on earth to be finished.

We know the story well. Luke tells us in chapter 23 that Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. He is a Jew – a dedicated, educated Jew who longs to celebrate the Passover in the Holy City, just as all Jews do, still today.

The Passover, of course, is the meal and the celebration – the ritual remembrance of the time when God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land.

And Jesus and his disciples (and probably many other friends, including the women who followed him and served in his ministry in a number of ways) – they were all in Jerusalem for Passover.

And we know that the night he was arrested, he had celebrated the Passover meal with his friends and that we were given the Lords Supper at that time. He then went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray and it was there that Judas, the disciple who betrayed him, led the Temple leaders to where he was.

He was arrested, held in a mock trial, accused of blasphemy, was beaten, mocked and nailed to a cross like the worst criminal. He bled and died on that cross. He gave his life as a sacrifice because of his passionate love for us.

One of the great questions of the world and over the eons has been "Why?" Why did he have to go through the shame and the pain? Why was he treated so horribly? Why did he have to suffer so?

David Lose, who writes in the online preaching commentary I subscribe to says “Faithful Christians throughout the Church’s long history have struggled to address just this question (of why), and their various answers have been described as “theories of atonement.”

Emphasizing one part of the Biblical witness or another, these theories attempt to address the “why” question by describing Christ’s death as a substitution for our own, or of Christ satisfying God’s requirement for holiness, or of Christ paying the penalty for sin, or of the example Christ’s death sets for us, or even of the victory Christ wins over death and the devil.

And yet while each of these theories highlights some aspect of the truth of our Lord’s death, none of them ultimately satisfies. Our questions persist.”

Truth is, we may never completely understand this mystery of Jesus’ death. But there is one thing that is important for us to hear – and it comes from Jesus. Maybe it is not a clear answer as to *why* he died, but it is a very direct answer as to *who* he died for.

When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we hear it. Every time we hear those words that Jesus said – to the disciples then and to all of us today, we hear who it was all for:

“This is my body – given for YOU!

“This is my blood – shed for YOU!

David Lose goes on to say “So while Jesus doesn’t answer the question “why?” he does answer – and answer definitively – the deeper question of “for whom?”

That is, though Jesus may not explain the full meaning of his death, he leaves no doubt as to its significance for you and for me, as above and beyond all our confusion and questions, we hear in these two words the shocking, unimaginable, and utterly unexpected promise that everything Christ suffers – all the humiliation and shame, all the defeat and agony – he suffers *for us*, that we might have life and light and hope in his name!

And this we know because Luke makes it abundantly, even painfully clear that Jesus gives himself over to death willingly. As Luke writes near the end of the Passion account, “Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last.” (End quote)

It wasn’t a horrible accident, it wasn’t a mistake or just a terrible tragedy, it wasn’t something that happened against Jesus’ own will. Jesus went to the cross for YOU. He went of his own will and out of great passion and love for YOU! He *commends* His Spirit to the Father because it is His will, His work, His love, His passion for YOU.

Of course, the great challenge is that we, as Jesus' disciples, are called to be like him – to "have the same mind as Christ."

The apostle Paul writes to the church at Philippi about how humble Jesus was. He writes: ⁶ "who, though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."

Peterson's interpretation of that passage in the Message says it a little differently. He writes:

"Jesus had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human!* Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion."

And Paul says that because of Jesus' obedience God lifted him up above all others and that there will be a day when everyone in heaven and on earth will bow down to him and worship him.

Paul's point is that we are to have the same mind as Christ Jesus. That we are to think in the ways he thought – that is, loving others as he loves them; humbling ourselves for the sake of others; being, doing, and thinking in selfless ways about how we can give ourselves to others for Christ's sake.

Jesus' died with his arms stretched out. We don't fully understand WHY. But we need to realize for WHOM. It was for you and for me!

His love was for us and his command is for us to do the same. We are his disciples and we honor him and his death when we allow our hearts to be melted out of love for others and when we are willing to let our minds be molded and shaped in the same way and with the same thinking as Christ.

³ "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit," Paul writes, "but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:3-4).