

## A Different Kind of King

This past Sunday we celebrated Palm Sunday, a commemoration of the moment that Jesus rode into Jerusalem and was greeted by the crowds with shouts of “Hosanna”. That day Jesus fulfilled the prophetic image foretold in Zechariah...

“Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

The crowds were excited in seeing this take place because in each generation there was a hope that the Messiah, a special anointed king, would rise up and defeat Israel's enemies and usher in the Kingdom of God here on earth. Many rightly looked to Jesus as this Messiah, but their hopes did not quite match God's plans. The Israelites had many enemies throughout history: the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Babylonians, the Persians, and now the Romans. In the midst of this Roman occupation, the people were looking for economic prosperity, lower taxes, secure borders, someone to make their nation great again. Even some of the disciples had this idea that Jesus was their ticket to power and prosperity in this world - asking who might sit at his right hand when he took his throne.

Jesus would take a much different path than anyone expected of a king...

Rather than being welcomed by the powers that be, he would be accused in their courts. Rather than wearing a crown of gold, he would wear a crown of thorns. Rather than a red carpet, he would walk the way of suffering. Rather than sitting on a throne he would be nailed to a cross. Rather than asserting his power, he would willingly lay down his life...

Jesus did this to defeat an enemy much greater than the Empires of the world, he did this to conquer our ultimate enemy: sin and its hold upon us. Jesus did this to usher in a kingdom that is not measured by borders - but in souls that are surrendered to His Lordship, secure for eternity. What looked like utter failure, would become ultimate victory. what looked like a lost cause, would completely change the world. This is Jesus Christ our king!

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Steven Amarin

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## The Other Side of Betrayal

How do you respond when someone close to you lets you down, or even worse, betrays you? When we look at each of the prominent men and women of the bible we can see that they each faced major setbacks and betrayals. I think of Joseph in the book of Genesis, betrayed by his brothers, beaten, thrown in a well and sold as a slave. Each time things seemed to turn around, another setback would knock Joseph back down to square one. Remarkably, when Joseph was reunited with his brothers years later, he shared these powerful words:

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20).

Hindsight enabled Joseph to see through all the betrayal, heartache and setbacks to see God's hand at work in raising him up as a powerful leader who would save countless lives.

On Wednesday of Holy Week we often reflect on the moment that Judas approached the religious leaders and agreed to betray Jesus into their hands for thirty pieces of silver. It is thought by some historians that Judas *Iscairiot* had once belonged to a band of Jewish revolutionaries called the *Sicarii*. Perhaps once Judas recognized that Jesus was not going to spark the political revolution he hoped for, he cut his losses. Whatever the case, Judas was a man whose heart was warped by greed and ambition - with each compromise, Judas surrendered himself to the enemy.

When we consider the betrayal of Jesus at the hand of Judas we must also consider that Jesus was then betrayed by his country (Herod), the religious powers (Caiphas) and worldly empire (Pontius Pilate) - moreover he was abandoned by his closest friends and would bear the weight of our sin, alone upon the cross. This is betrayal of the highest degree - but Jesus willingly took all this pain for the joy that was to come.

What we see in Joseph's revelation to his brothers, we see in a greater degree with Jesus: *What was intended for evil - God used for the good - the saving of many.*

When we, as children of God, suffer betrayal we can come before God who gives us grace and can work all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). But even greater, we can marvel at the fact that Jesus bore ultimate betrayal so that we would be counted among the saved.

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## Foolishness

Well folks, today is April Fools Day, a tradition that goes back many centuries and is celebrated in many cultures. It's a day where we can expect a few practical jokes and hoaxes to come our way... and even though we expect it - we still might find ourselves embarrassingly surprised when someone exclaims, "April Fools!" after pulling one over on us.

As we consider this weekend and Jesus' journey to the cross there are many people who would consider the message of Jesus as foolishness. Consider these words from the apostle Paul...

*"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:19).*

He goes on to say...

*"Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).*

As the apostles shared the good news of Jesus with the world, they came up against a real challenge. Many Jewish people saw Jesus' death as an utter failure - after all, Jesus was executed as a criminal by their highest authorities and in their eyes he had failed to literally take the throne of their beloved king David.

The Greeks (non-Jewish people / Gentiles) also considered the message of Christ and his death upon the cross as foolishness. They did not see in Jesus what they admired about their mythical gods. In their minds no reputable person, or god for that matter, could ever die of crucifixion. In their eyes it was failure and foolishness - death was defeat.

This message of Christ crucified still sounds foolish to a world that worships things like money, power and beauty. As Jesus died upon the cross he was a poor servant, he emptied himself of power and privilege, and was beaten and disfigured - hardly the picture of worldly success. But God chose what looked foolish to the world to be his glory; what looked like weakness to demonstrate His power.

There are many people in this world who are still seeking redemption, power and immortality through their own strength and wisdom, but with God these things can only be found as we come to the cross. At the cross Jesus emptied himself of all things so that we could receive all things. When we come to see the precious gift that Jesus offers us in himself, it would be foolish to refuse!

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