

## Holy Week! It's here!

Holy week! It's finally here! The week we celebrate the final days of Jesus' life. It begins on a high note, today, with the celebration of Jesus coming into Jerusalem and being called Blessed by those around him. People were waving palms and really celebrating Jesus coming.

From there the week moves to Judas making a deal with the religious authority to turn Jesus over to them, we have the Last Supper (which we will celebrate this Thursday) then the crucifixion (which we will reflect on this Friday) then we end this Holy Week on a high note again where we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning.

What a week this is. During this week we are happy, somber, angry, depressed, sad, confused, and then happy again. That's just what we go through - think what Jesus went through.

In this country we like to celebrate Christmas as our one really big holiday. After all, it is a celebration of Jesus being born. But for me, Easter is much more important.

I feel that Christmas would be nothing if it wasn't for the message we get at Easter. So this week, Holy Week, I think it is even more important for us to reflect on Jesus and his gift to us than it is for us to celebrate during any other time of the year.

So let's look what Palm Sunday is all about. In our first scripture, Noel read for us how Jesus was entering Jerusalem – riding in on a donkey. The religious scholars have called this His triumphal entry.

Here he is, the King of Kings, entering Jerusalem. People waving palm branches – which in those days meant triumph and victory. They were excited. Here comes this prophet, one that many people say is the Messiah, the one prophesied about for centuries.

Here he is, riding a donkey just like the prophet Zechariah prophesied years before.

So they thought that Jesus was entering Jerusalem to show everyone that he truly was the Messiah – the Savior of the land. So here He comes with His head held up high, on a donkey that had never been ridden on before – just like a king would ride on a donkey that had never been ridden on before.

When he came into town that way his disciples had to know that Jesus was showing that he was the King of Kings. So everyone around started waving those palm leaves and laid down their cloaks – just like he was a king coming into town. They were shouting Hosanna in the highest – Kind of like shouting Hallelujah – Praise God.

But all of this pomp and circumstance made the Jewish authorities a little scared. I think on the one hand they were worried that Jesus and his followers were preaching something that was dangerous to their own beliefs, but I think they were scared of something even bigger.

I tend to think they were more worried about the Romans that were occupying Jerusalem. If the Romans thought that there was an uprising happening then hundreds, maybe thousands of Jews were in danger because the Romans would kill anyone and everyone they thought were causing trouble – and that might include some of the Jews that were in authority.

To get an idea of what the Jewish Religious Authority was thinking, I invite you to turn in your Bibles to John 11 – verses 45- 50 (Picking up where we left off last week.)

So at that point, even though more people were starting to believe in Jesus, they had decided that it was better for him to die than for many others.

You know, on one hand that sounds so wrong. Here He was sharing a message of hope, and trying to teach people the true nature of God. But they thought it was better for Him to die than for anyone else to die.

And the sad truth is that they were right. Jesus didn't just die so the Jews back then would live, but he also died so you and I could live. By Jesus going to that cross, he died for us, for our sins, for our transgressions. He died so we would be right with God. He died to be the final sacrifice.

But I am jumping ahead of myself. Today is Palm Sunday – still a celebration! Still a time to party! Many people were ready for the Messiah. They were pumped up, they were excited! Many of them were just waiting for him to do something!

They were ready to see Jesus rally the troops, or do some Godly thing and destroy all the Romans, or to start teaching people to fight. They were ready for something – and they wanted it to happen now.

So the Bible tells us that Jesus went into the temple and turned over some tables of people making a profit off of those coming to worship at the temple. Okay, great – Jesus is getting geared up – He is cleaning up the temple.

Great, now Jesus goes and starts teaching people – but the disciples thought, wait a minute, he isn't teaching us how to use swords against our enemies, he is teaching us more about the kingdom of heaven.

Then Jesus goes on to tell some stories, and then some more stories, and then yet, some more stories.

Here they were pumped up. They had their parade, they let the donkey walk on their coats, they waved their palm branches – they did their part - what was going on? Why wasn't Jesus doing what they thought the Messiah should be doing? They weren't exactly sure what the Messiah should be doing, but surely it is something more than telling stories about heaven.

And this is where the story of Judas comes in. Most of us have heard of Judas before, the one that sold Jesus out to the religious authority of the day.

There is a lot of discussion about why Judas betrayed Jesus.

There is a book called the Gospel of Judas that was written about 300 years after Jesus died that suggested that Judas was simply following directions from Jesus to turn him over to the religious authority.

Other people believe that Judas was simply evil and was trying to destroy Jesus.

Other people believe that Judas was let down after the Triumphal Entry. He felt disillusioned and thought that Jesus was all talk – and that he must not have been the Messiah, so he might as well make some money off of it.

But I really don't agree with those points of view. Sure they might all be partially right, but I actually don't think that Judas betrayed Jesus in the way that we normally consider the word betrayed.

See, I think Judas was simply trying to help Jesus out. I think Judas really believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and I think he just thought Jesus was taking a little too long to come into his power and take over the temple and then take over all of Jerusalem and get rid of the Romans.

So I think Judas made a deal with the religious authority, not to bring Jesus to them, but actually to bring them to Jesus so Jesus would finally have to do something and show that he was in charge.

The reason I believe this is from Matthew Chapter 27 verses 3-5.

Judas felt true remorse. When he saw that Jesus was condemned he felt terrible. This wasn't what he had planned. This isn't what Judas wanted. He felt so guilty he tried to return the money he was paid. Then, guilt overtook him, and he killed himself.

When I think about what Judas did to Jesus, it makes me think.

Have I ever had a Judas in my life? Someone who did something bad behind my back, or someone who did something that had negative ramifications to my life, or who did something to a person I care about?

Many times I think we are too quick to judge the actions of someone else saying that they, “don’t care,” or that “they are on a power trip”, or that “they are vindictive”, or that “they are evil” without us really taking the time to try to figure out what their motive was.

Think about the last time someone did something to you or to someone you care about – do we really know what their true motive was? Have we taken the time to find out?

Maybe it isn’t what we think it is. Maybe their motives were pure in their minds and hearts and the results weren’t what they intended.

I fully believe that Judas didn’t want to see Jesus condemned. And I am sure that Jesus forgave Judas.

And since Jesus forgave someone like Judas, we should ask ourselves, who do we need to forgive? Who is our Judas?

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