

Letting Go

We human beings are endlessly creative when it comes to trying to figure stuff out in life.

That's often a wonderful thing about us, and accounts for much that is good and useful in our society, from medical cures to engineering designs that are functional and beautiful, to the deep thoughts expressed by our poets and philosophers.

But sometimes we can and do, overthink.

And perhaps one of the most over thought moments in our common history is that moment in time in which Jesus enters Jerusalem with hosannas and palm wavers, soon to be followed by that sham of a trial, his torture and grotesque death on the cross.

Why did these things happen?

And over the years, we've come up with all kinds of ideas.

God, say some great thinkers, is like a king who has been dishonored by our sins, so we owe God a debt, a debt we can never repay, so God sends his son to pay the debt on our behalf.

Other great thinkers say Jesus died as a ransom for all of humanity.

That the devil held us all in his grip, kidnapping us, in effect, and Jesus, in giving his life, paid the required ransom.

A more recent thinker says that God, through Jesus, in becoming the innocent scapegoat who dies for us, frees us from our obsession with seeking out and blaming scapegoats.

Something we've done forever: just think of all the despised people who are used to pit "us against them."

And so this great thinker says Jesus frees us from this mentality by shaming us into seeing that every scapegoat — is God.

And while all of these ideas perhaps hold some truth, I wonder if something else is actually going on between Palm Sunday and Good Friday?

What if the parade of palms which ends on the cross is in fact the unfolding, the natural consequence, of what happened in the desert at the start of his ministry?

Remember those days, when the devil confronts Jesus with the temptations of power, fame and wealth?

“You’re hungry, use your power to turn stone to bread.”

“One doesn’t live only on bread, but on God’s word.”

“Throw yourself off the high place, God will rescue you.”

“Don’t tempt God.”

“Worship me and rule the world.”

“Worship only God.”

Such were the temptations Jesus rejects in favor of an unwavering and complete surrender to God.

But let’s be very clear about one thing.

It’s not that Jesus is a spiritual Rambo able to say no to the Temptations because of some inner strength..

Instead, just before his trip into the desert, he was baptized, just like you have been, and that voice spoke to him saying, "you are my son whom I love."

Those same words were spoken by God at your baptism, whether you remember hearing them or not.

Jesus trusts that love, surrenders to the depths of that love, and that's what saves Jesus from the Temptations.

Because the parade of palms sets the stage for accepting power, fame and wealth as the way of salvation.

You can hear the excitement, the anticipation:

"At last our political leader, our warrior Messiah, is here!"

Just as we today, when we forget God's boundless love for us, put our faith in weapons of terrible destruction, in the economy, and of course, in Kim Kardashian.

Just like the desert days, here at the parade, Jesus is once again challenged to take the road of control as his last days approach; and that same challenge presents itself to us each and every day.

Power, fame and wealth IS the path to salvation in our world today.

It's the air we breathe and the water we drink.

It's how a man like our current president becomes the leader of this nation, because of our enchantment with power, fame and wealth.

Yet, in these sacred days, Jesus rejects once again the false promise of power, fame, and wealth, and once more surrenders completely to the God who loves completely.

Which is why he makes no defense at his trial.

Which is why he understands the fear and trembling of his friends.

Which is why he forgives all of us for our complicity in his death.

And make no mistake, we are complicit — every time we give ourselves over to power, fame or wealth in seeking our salvation.

And yet we are forgiven, because perhaps what Jesus hopes we shall see from our place of forgiveness is that the life of complete surrender to the God who loves us completely is the only life worth living, the only life that lasts.

We are in the midst of a pandemic.

Life as we know it is upended.

While economists used to tout the 200,000 jobs being created each month, we are now in a time when 6 million lose their job in a week.

In the midst of all of this loss of control, here we are, in Holy Week.

And maybe for the first time in a long time, we can actually swallow the great truth that Jesus comes to bring.

That it's not about appeasing an angry God nor is it about paying a ransom to the devil.

The great truth Jesus brings is that surrender, letting go, letting be, is the gateway to true life.

Fr Richard Rohr puts it this way:

“Learning that we are not in control is the truth of our situation.

Finding peace in this world means coming to accept that we're not steering the ship.

That truth is the bedrock of each and every religion.

Mystics know they are being guided, and their willingness to float on the breeze of that guidance is precisely what allows their spiritual journey to take flight.

We cannot understand the joy, the release, that comes with surrender to this God of all consuming love — unless we try it — and experience first hand the delicious freedom that surrender gives to those willing to trust." Meditations 4/2/20, modified.

We are living in days when the invitation to surrender has never been more obvious, or necessary, yet very frightening indeed.

If we give in to the fear, and retreat to our old habits of insisting upon being in control, then all that awaits us is disappointment, frustration and anger.

But if we accept this invitation to surrender, to let what is be, to trust that all shall be well, then, we shall stand at the entry way to the life that really is life.

A life which we most of us can only catch a glimpse of, because so much in our society tells us to take charge, to be the master of our own fate, to do it "my way!"

Coming to see that these are simply lies and illusions can be, and often is, a painful awakening.

"For many of us, this pandemic may be the first time in our lives that we have felt so little control over our own destiny and the destiny of those we love.

It may feel like a humiliating loss, a stepping backward, an unwanted vulnerability.

Yet, accepting our lack of control is the starting point for any serious spiritual walk toward wisdom and truth." Id.

What Jesus does today is to walk the walk of letting go, under the most horrific circumstances.

Yet that walk leads not to obliteration, it leads to resurrection!

Because it is a walk straight into the loving arms of the Lover who makes all things, who brings life out of every death.

Including yours.

Including mine.

In these difficult days, may you find the desire to follow the way of Jesus.

May you find in your own letting go — the joy and peace that only God can give.

+amen

