

Prelude to the Passion: (Matthew 26:14-27:66, 4/9/17):

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is filled with such hope and celebration. It feels like a movement has begun that is unstoppable. Somewhat like the Arab spring we witnessed not that long ago when ordinary, average people rose up in the streets claiming that enough was enough. The oppressive ways of Dictators and Tyrants had to come to an end. No more would their lives be ruled by the strong-armed tactics of the powerful few. No more.

‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

It was beyond their ability to pull together the grandiose accouterments normally reserved for official Kingly receptions but they did what they could. They tore palm branches from trees and laid them on the ground. They shed one of their most valuable possessions, a cloak, and spread them out on the pathway for Jesus' donkey to walk upon. This was the people's King who would rule with compassion and mercy.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, we're told, the whole city was in turmoil. So grand and vast was this popular movement, it stirred worry among both the political and religious elite alike. ‘Who is this?’ Everyone asked. ‘Who is this that has caused such a stir?’

‘The prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’ Was the answer that was shouted back.

Jesus' first stop after entering Jerusalem was the Temple and, boy, what a stir he caused there. In fact, he seemed to play into the role of one who would bring down those in power with unstoppable force – a true super hero minus the cape. Tables went flying, the sound of metal coins hitting the floor echoed off the walls, the angry shouts of Jesus filled the Temple as he condemned the marketers who had turned God's house of prayer into a mall. The masses rubbed their hands in glee. Finally, someone was on their side. Finally, things were looking up. Admittedly, there's a part of me that wants to rub my hands too when I think about how much fuller our malls are on Sunday mornings than our churches. You go, Jesus! I'm with you, right behind you!

I'm right behind you. This is what gets me. Where did these right-

behind-you-parade-initiating people go? It is simply a shock to the system to consider how quickly things changed. The tirade in the temple doesn't go as people assumed. Jesus cuts it off before it even really gets started. What a beautiful riot it could have been but, no. Jesus ends it as abruptly as it began and the people quickly dissipate and disappear. The disciples begin to distance themselves. Even the once rebellious Jesus becomes painfully, excruciatingly quiet as he is arrested and put on trial and finally nailed to the cross.

This is a story most painful. It would not make the cut of super-hero movies that fill our movie screens these days. Jesus was not the Super-Messiah people thought he was going to be or suspected he had to be.

How could things change so dramatically and so quickly? From parade to suffering, from good news to disappointment, from crowds of support to deafening silence, from 'Hosanna' to 'Crucify Him'?

When you think about it, it is not unlike life. Our lives can and often are turned upside down in an instant. One phone call such as the one we received a few weeks ago on a Saturday night telling us that my Father-In-Law had been rushed to a hospital and might not last the night. Everything was radically turned upside down in a matter of minutes. A phone call, a text, a storm, a fire, a tragedy, a car accident, an unwise decision, a diagnosis...suddenly our world is sent reeling, nothing will ever be the same again; laughter one minute, tears the next. Time and time again, our minds struggle to catch up with reality. Life's fragility takes center stage.

'Eli, Eli, lema Sabachthani.' 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' How could we go from Palm Sunday exuberance to this? I don't know but we do...all too often in fact. And this God, this Jesus, this Savior gets it, understands it, has suffered through it too.

As we make our way through this week of suffering to Easter morning, we will learn how to look back on where Jesus has been and, in the process, realize that somehow Jesus' seemingly senseless, horrific suffering wasn't senseless at all. Our creating God miraculously filled even the cross with meaning and power and purpose and hope. And it is to this same hope we cling. The hope that, in hindsight, one day we too

will understand how this God's determination filled even our days of tears and pain with meaning and power and purpose and hope. And so, with this in mind, let us listen to the story of Jesus's passion.