

Palm Sunday, 2018  
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA  
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I thought it was like the Macy's parade.

When I was a child, I loved Palm Sunday. To my ears, the Gospel story sounded a lot like the Macy's parade. I pictured a parade on a wide street, leading into Jerusalem.

I pictured the crowds on the sidewalks, waiving palms. People sang the praises of Jesus - maybe they had a marching band with them?

And, just like *Santa* at the end of the Macy's parade, along came *Jesus*. "There he is! The Messiah!"

I thought it was like the Macy's parade.

4 years ago, I visited Jerusalem for the first time. Our guide told us we were going to walk the same route that Jesus followed on Palm Sunday. We got off the bus, and followed our guide.

But we were not walking on a wide street, like I had in my mind. We were on a little path that wound its way down the Mount of Olives.

Our guide assured us that this was the road that Jesus followed as he came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

But this didn't seem right to me! I had always pictured an orderly parade. But on this curving little path, the crowd surrounding Jesus on Palm Sunday must have been chaos and confusion. People pushing. Children crying. Officials worried that things could get out of hand.

We came to a clearing, and from the Mount of Olives we could look across the valley and see Jerusalem, sitting on top of the other hill.

TO get a better sense of the geography I'm describing, picture the city of Richmond. To the east is Church Hill. Then you go down to Shockoe Valley. Then you go up the hill and you're at city hall and the capitol.

If you stand on Church Hill, you can look across the valley and see the city rising up the hill to the west.

Well, it's the same in the Holy Land. We were standing on the Mount of Olives. Looking across the valley, we could see Jerusalem rising up on the other hill to the west.

And, as we stood there, something important dawned on me. I pictured Jesus, riding that donkey, hearing people as they praised him.

And then I pictured Jesus looking up from where he sat on his donkey. And what did Jesus see as he looked across the valley? (It's basically the same thing you see today)

To the left was the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas. On Palm Sunday, that palace probably gleamed in the sun. Four nights later, Jesus would be dragged there in the *dark*. There, the religious leaders would hold a sham trial.

Over to the right was Pilate's residence. As Jesus sat on that donkey and heard the crowd shouting, "Hosanna," he could look across to Pilate's fortress, where, the following Friday, a crowd would shout "Crucify him."

And, as Jesus sat on his donkey, he could see the far western city wall. Just behind that wall was a hill called Golgotha. The "skull place." Where he would die on Friday afternoon.

Friends, do you see what this means? As Jesus was surrounded by the jostling, joyful crowd of people who were shouting his praises, he sat on his donkey, looking at the places in Jerusalem where the horrible events of his condemnation and death would take place. He could see it all, right in front of him.

And this is what amazes me most – *he didn't turn around*. He could have said, 'folks, let's go back to Galilee and hide.'

But Jesus did not hide from what was coming. He went forward. And he said to his disciples, "Follow me."

Jesus *saw what was coming*. He could have turned away, but he went forward, trusting that his 'Abba, Father,' was with him.

For us, there are times in life when challenging things happen suddenly. And we say, "I didn't see that coming!"

But, other times, we SEE the hard thing coming, and our first instinct is to... escape.

You start a job, but then you see how much effort it will require. You're tempted to turn the donkey around and go a different direction.

You get married, and then you begin to see what love is going to require. You're going to have to give more than you thought, and change more than you want... you're tempted to escape.

Someone you love gets sick. You see what's coming: the caregiving, the hard tasks. Or maybe YOU get sick, and you see what's coming. The treatments. The rehab. You're tempted to hide.

You draw closer to Christ. Then you see what's coming. Christ is going to ask you to love your enemy! He's going to ask you to care for the poor; to forgive; to be chaste; to put people ahead of money; to stop being angry.

He's going to ask you to do justice, and be honest. He's going to ask you to defend human life, and defend the orphan. You see it coming. It's gonna be hard. You're tempted to flee.

You face death. And every fiber of you wants to hide. Then Jesus, the crucified and risen one says, "Follow me. We'll do this together."

When you are tempted to flee from what love requires, remember Jesus, on that donkey. From his lonely seat on a beast of burden, Jesus looks across the Kidron Valley, and he sees what's coming.

And here's the miracle: *he loves you so much that he goes forward.* And he says, "Follow me."

When you are tempted to run from what love requires, when you are tempted to escape the hard thing that life has handed you, the crucified and risen one says, "come on. Follow me. We'll do this together."

This holy week, we focus on Jesus Christ, who loved us so much that he did not run from the consequences of loving us. He paid the price to stay faithful. He gave everything...for us.

He taught us how to stay where we should stay, to go where we should go, and be who we should be. Turn to him. Pray to him. Follow him. He will lead you, through the cross, through death, to life. He always gives us the strength to do what love requires.