

Luke 19:37-42 | EHV

As [Jesus] was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to praise God joyfully, with a loud voice, for all the miracles they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

He replied, "I tell you, if these people would be silent, the stones would cry out."

As he came near, he saw the city and wept over it. He said, "If you, yes you, had only known on this day the things that would bring peace to you. But now, it is hidden from your eyes."

Hosanna!

Jerusalem was always packed during the Passover. Its population grew from 50,000 to over 250,000 people. Every last person was excited to be there. And they were not only excitable in the sense of religious fervor; they were also incite-able, politically speaking. All it would take is one little incident to spark a riot or a revolution.

And wouldn't you know it? Here comes Jesus, that prophet from Galilee, the miracle-worker, riding a donkey --just like Zechariah said the Messiah would-- right into the middle of the crowds. The excitement reached a fevered pitch as the people paved the road with their cloaks and cut palm branches off the trees to wave and lay before him as they sang the praises of their King.

As excited as those people were at the sight of Jesus approaching, his enemies were just as moved – but to the other extreme. Some of them, in fact, were so incensed they actually pushed their way through the crowds, ran up alongside Jesus, and got right in his face so they could order Jesus to calm the people down. "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" they shouted over the roar of the crowd.

The closer and closer Jesus got, the less and less they liked it. They saw Jesus as a threat. Everything important to them was on the line –their place in society, their reputations, their rights, their privileges. So much of their power and prestige depended on the Romans who would let them keep their jobs only as long as they kept the peace. But if the Jewish leaders lost control of the crowds, they'd lose everything.

And if the people followed Jesus and what he taught –instead of following them and their time-honored traditions-- these religious leaders and everything they held dear would be rendered useless in the eyes of the people. The closer and closer Jesus came to them; the less and less they liked it.

They had to do something! If they did nothing, they'd become nothing. And so they started speaking out against Jesus. Then, the Evangelist Mark tells us, "They began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching" (Mark 11:18).

So, tell me, how does it make you feel when Jesus gets closer and closer to you? Have you ever felt less like the cheerful faithful in the crowd and more like one of those chief priests or teachers of the law?

There is something about Jesus that is unsettling, isn't there? We feel it when his words are harsh – when Jesus calls sin a sin-- when he condemns us and threatens us with hellfire for our rebellion. We notice it when we learn that lip service every other week on a Sunday morning just won't cut it. When we realize that real worship demands real service throughout the week and we find that we either have no intention of rendering it or we discover that "the evil we don't want to do we just keep on doing."

Admit it, Jesus unnerves people with his upside down way of looking at things –“be weak,” he says, in order to be strong; “be poor” in order to be rich; “humble yourself and serve others” in order to be great, “loose your life if you want to save it.” And we know exactly what Jesus means.

What Jesus wants is total commitment. He doesn't want to just save our souls; he wants to rule our hearts and reign over every aspect of our lives. And the closer and closer Jesus comes, the less and less we seem able to commit. And then you're faced with the same question Jesus' enemies had to struggle with: “*What are you going to do with a King like this?*”

You can certainly try to keep Jesus at a distance –just let your Bible sit on the shelf and collect dust. Neglect the sacraments. Skip church more often than not. But Jesus can still find a way to draw closer to you through one of his disciples --people like that pious spouse or your devout dad or that precious child of yours. Don't be surprised if your son or daughter or grandchild asks you to bring them to church or come and hear them sing. They just want Jesus to mean as much to you as he means to them. Don't feel threatened when someone who really loves you and cares for your soul wants to sit down and talk to you about the choices you've made in life and what Jesus has to say about it. The reason Jesus gave you a devout wife or concerned parents or caring friends is because he loves you and wants to draw closer to you through them. (And, please, don't ask Jesus to rebuke those disciples like the Pharisees did).

Christ came near to Jerusalem that day and many people cheered him. He didn't frighten them. He didn't scare them. He excited them. Why? They were sinners just like you and me. Just like us they had every reason to feel threatened by this holy Son of God. But they weren't! “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” they sang, borrowing a verse from the Psalms and shouting for joy.

Why were they so thrilled instead of so worried? It was because Jesus was coming not as their conqueror, but as their Savior. He was coming not to condemn them or overthrow them, but to do battle for them against the dark spiritual forces in the world and in their lives. He was coming to help. He was coming to heal. He was coming to win the victory for them, not over them.

That's why Jesus still comes to us today. It's the only reason he comes to us through other people, too. This King comes to secure your eternal freedom. His purpose is to put himself at your disposal, to become your servant and to fight the spiritual and eternal battles you will certainly lose on your own.

This King isn't interested in forcing you to follow him. He doesn't come near you in order to coerce your allegiance. He comes to save you from your sin, from death and from Satan. Sometimes this King even comes to save you from yourself. He comes to win your heart and inspire your joyful obedience, compelled by no force other than the power of his great love for you.

And, if you see Jesus coming toward you and you can't see that every intention he has is good –your eternal good-- I'm afraid this King won't do you any good.

But, the good Lord willing, as we begin another new Church Year, you'll see Jesus coming closer and closer to you. He'll get close enough for you to see the tears in his eyes that he has cried over people who insist on keeping their distance.

And then you'll keep watching as he takes your place on the cross –as he is damned in your place. You'll watch him rise from the grave to declare you God's child and an heir of heaven. You'll see him retake the throne of heaven. You'll remember that he's preparing a place for you there and you'll look forward to the King of king's and the Lord of lord's return in glory and great might.

And you'll find yourself caught up in the crowds shouting, “Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!” “Blessed is *my* King who comes to save me!” Amen.