

On the Night

The Sixth Week of Lent

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"
The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."
Matthew 21:1-11 (NIV)

Hindsight is an amazing thing. It's easy to look back on the events of the days leading up to Jesus' passion and resurrection and to wonder how the disciples could have been so clueless, how the Pharisees could have been so villainous, how the crowds could have been so fickle.

Some of that's the Sunday School narrative (or just skimming the text). For instance, we have this mental picture of Jesus riding into Jerusalem, the twelve following behind, and a bunch of strangers strewing the roads with branches and proclaiming Jesus as king. In fact, Jesus was accompanied by a "crowd of disciples." So it wasn't the anonymous "people" who hailed Jesus on His triumphal entry and then called for His crucifixion just days later. His disciples were the crowds throwing down palm branches before Him. The people were looking on in bewilderment.



And not all the Pharisees were antagonistic toward Jesus. In Luke's account of the triumphal entry (Luke 19:35-40 (NIV)), it seems that it was Pharisees *with* Jesus who called out what they saw as their fellow disciples' bad behavior. Making a ruckus, creating a spontaneous parade, and calling Jesus a king ... in public ... in Jerusalem.

It was one thing to acknowledge Jesus as their teacher and a prophet, but "Son of David"? "King of Israel"? Those were serious (and inflammatory and treasonous) titles to be throwing around. Those were the sort of titles that would lead to stoning (by the Jews) or crucifixion by the (Romans).

Enough of Jesus' followers recognized Him as the Messiah to hail Him as "the king who comes in the name of the Lord." Unfortunately, many (perhaps most) of them thought that meant a political rather than a spiritual king.

The odd thing is that Jesus didn't correct their misunderstanding. He's the only person in history who could honestly say, "I know exactly what you're thinking." Yet He let them learn, grow in their understanding, and later look back on their ignorance and perhaps cringe or, better, give themselves grace.

We can frown on the players of what we've come to call Palm Sunday because we're seeing their situation from the outside, in hindsight. But at some point, every one of us has assigned Jesus an incomplete, insufficient, or incorrect role. And I suspect that at some point, every one of us has said, "What was I thinking?"

And still, God allows us to learn, grow, look back on our ignorance, and give ourselves the same grace He's given us. That is the beauty of hindsight. Hindsight showcases God's grace.



What have you come to realize about who Jesus is that you didn't understand in the past?

How can you remind yourself of the grace God has given you for these misunderstandings?

EXERCISE:

1. Lift this exercise up to the Lord, asking Him to highlight what He wants you to notice.
2. Read the passage below, stopping at any words or phrases that catch your attention. Sit with the word or phrase, meditating on it and asking God to show you why this word or phrase caught your attention. After you've meditated on the thing that caught your attention, continue reading the passage, stopping at any other words or phrases that strike you, and discussing with the Lord what you've noticed.
3. Take a few moments to sit quietly before moving on to the next step.
4. Slowly read the passage a second time, again pausing when something catches your attention. This time ask God to show you what He wants you to know or do in light of the word or phrase that you've noticed. Wait to hear what the Lord may put into your heart or mind. (You may sense a strong impression or just what seems to be a fleeting thought. Don't dismiss anything.)
5. Take a few moments to sit quietly before moving on to the next step.
6. Slowly read the passage a third time, just letting God's Word soak into you.
7. Finally, sit quietly for a bit, and allow God to continue to work in you.

Luke 19:35-44 (NIV)

³⁵ They ... threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

⁴⁰ "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."