

PRAISE INTERNATIONAL
THE MARCH OF JESUS
JOHN 12:12-16

Good Morning

Prayer Needs

Above all, Christ gave imaginative shape and dimensions to the kingdom he proclaimed by requiring that his followers forego vengeance, bear the burdens of others, forgive debts, share their goods with the poor, and love their enemies, and by forbidding them from passing judgment on others for their sins. He also insisted that his disciples keep company with the most despised members of society, including even tax collectors, Samaritans and harlots.

— David Bentley Hart

Now mattering on your religious history most of us have some memory of the one Sunday we parade into church. It was the day we would make Palm branch's available to the children and have the building staff begging us to ask parents to not leave branch's all over the building!

- Palm Sunday in most of our bibles referred to as Jesus Triumphant entry into Jerusalem with men and women shouting
- 'Hosanna' which means 'save us' laying their cloaks on the dusty ground - that was something you only did for Royalty. It was the March of Jesus!

Over the years I have participated in a number of what I would call Jesus March's. The first that comes to mind was in June of 1992. When we gathered hundreds of men women boys and girls from all over the City of Fort Wayne to join in a 'March For Jesus'. It was pretty exciting to help lead this dramatic event that had no label but Jesus and to sing and proclaim the name of Jesus over our City. March For Jesus was by then a global movement of christians gathering together not in protest but simply singing and proclaiming the Name of Jesus over the cities of the earth. 2 years later the March was called 'A Day to Change The World' when for the first time ever recorded the sound of worship and praise was lifted up in literally every time zone around the world.

5 years later I led several hundred men to Washington DC as a part of national call to prayer in Washington DC. It was called 'Stand in the Gap' and not only did I participate and help bring men to the event but also had the unique privilege of praying on the floor of the house of Representatives and in the office of the Speaker of the House.

I could tell you about other gatherings over the years each one a unique call to stand and pray for our City and our Nation - in each of them they carried a strong message not unlike the atmosphere described by the gospel writers of Jesus entrance into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday - **filled with anticipation and hope - will this be the key that opens a door to shift the world around us.** Now to be clear I think some of those gatherings had some strong impact.

But what was unique to those gatherings for me?

June 16, 1992 was the day we met our stillborn son - we buried him that day after our anniversary. I took a couple days off but on my return to work I assumed the role of not just singing in the March for Jesus but leading worship for the next two months. The second time that I said something from the platform about our grief I was taken to the side and informed that I should not make people feel

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uncomfortable when leading worship - *they need to be uplifted.*

- **The clear message whether intended or not - there is not place for grief and lament if you are going to help others.**

Just days before we filled 3 bus's that headed to Washington DC in Oct of 1997 - I was taken to the side and informed that was being placed under formal church discipline because I had been divisive. 'We know you and your wife have gossiped against leadership'. What we discovered was that one person shared with leaders their concern for how difficult a transition had been for us - things shared in a prayer support group of 3 individuals became the basis for removing me from responsibilities and possible from staff altogether.

- **The clear message was stop asking questions fall in line or you will bear the consequences of our power over you – it was a power move and it was not just.**

The truth is while on my knees on the mall in DC it was the first time I considered how easy it would be to simply disappear - by the way Satan can hit you with shame and blame even on your knees!

Those gatherings had a strong message not unlike the the atmosphere of the crowd on that first Palm Sunday - Hosanna - victory will be ours! But Jesus what do I do with mourning and injustice? No time for those issues when we have a battle to win - right!

Hosanna! Its not hard to get lost in a marching crowd and MISS the POINT of Jesus. And what about those who waved their branch's and shouted Hosanna, did they understand? As one scholar notes: *I suspect they did not.* After all, they were ripe for revolution.

They wanted — and expected — something world-altering. An ending-to-the-story worthy of their worship, their fervor, and their dusty cloaks-on-the-road.

But what they got instead a small donkey-ride from a weeping Jesus.

As New Testament scholar N.T Wright puts it, *what they got was a mismatch between their outsized expectations and God's small answer.*

The March of Jesus into Jerusalem was not about numbers or noise but a whole new way of living and seeing the world and that is Good News especially to the powerless, weak and vulnerable. A King has come who not just a keeper of Peace by force but who forever secured Peace and Freedom through self giving self emptying love and forgiveness. The real March of Jesus then and now looks and lives like Jesus.

Two New Testament scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan offer a an answer in their book The Last Week.

- As result of their study they suggest that Jesus was not the passive recipient of impromptu adoration on Palm Sunday.
- Though worship might have happened along the way, it was not the point.
- They argue that two processions entered Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday; Jesus' was not the only Triumphal Entry.
- Every year, the Roman governor of Judea would ride up to Jerusalem from his coastal residence in the west, specifically to be present in the city for Passover — the Jewish festival that swelled Jerusalem's population from its usual 50,000 to at least 200,000.

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The governor would come in all of his imperial majesty to remind the Jewish pilgrims that Rome was in charge. They could commemorate an ancient victory against Egypt if they wanted to, but real, present-day resistance (if anyone was daring to consider it) was futile; Rome was watching.

Here is Borg and Crossan's description of Pontius Pilate's imperial procession:

"A visual (display) of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold. Sounds: the marching of feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, the beating of drums. The swirling of dust. The eyes of the silent onlookers, some curious, some awed, some resentful."

According to Roman imperial belief, the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome;

- He was the Son of God.
- So for the empire's Jewish subjects, Pilate's procession was both a potent military threat and the embodiment of a rival theology.
- Armed heresy on horseback.
- As Pilate clanged and crashed his imperial way into Jerusalem from the west, Jesus approached from the east, looking (by contrast) ragtag and absurd.
- His was the procession of the small, the powerless, and the explicitly vulnerable.
- As Borg and Crossan remark, *"What we often call the triumphal entry was actually an anti-imperial, anti-triumphal one, a deliberate lampoon of the conquering emperor entering a city on horseback through gates opened in abject submission."*

They go on to note that Jesus rode *"the most unthreatening, most un-military mount imaginable: a female nursing donkey with her little colt trotting along beside her."*

- In fact, Jesus was drawing on the rich, prophetic symbolism of the Jewish Bible in his choice of mount.
- The prophet Zechariah predicted the ride of a king "on a colt, the foal of a donkey." He would be the nonviolent king who'd **"command peace to the nations."**

Two ideologies, two realms, two completely different stories parading the streets of Jerusalem.

- It's a powder keg about to explode, and people don't know what to do.
- **They should be at the West Gate bowing to Rome.** They should be throwing down cloaks and waving palms for **Pilate entering the front door as the Keeper of Peace** - riding a white stallion armed to the teeth conqueror with an army surrounding him - making his domination clear! They should be singing, dancing and witnessing the spectacle that is a representative of Caesar, but something new is taking place.
- **Jesus entering the back door as the Prince of Peace** - riding a donkey powerless, vulnerable with fisherman and women surrounding Him - knowing even this act will be a demonstration of His Dominion that will fulfilled in self giving self emptying love and forgiveness.

Hosanna - Save us!

- NT Wright puts it their expectations in Hosanna were *'get rid of that other procession'* and then comes Jesus in weakness - no army no sword no demand - **yet watch this Jesus in His generosity gave us what we asked for - Salvation from our enemies Sin Death and Grave.**

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Here is why this is such a powerful reminder on Palm Sunday we still live in a world that can so easily define its ethics in Power.

- Frederick Nietzsche correctly observed that in this kind of world **‘Good’ is defined by the person with Power.**
- So in our world Might makes right - even to the point of using violence in war.
- Pilate rides into Jerusalem making very clear 'we' will define what is Good and who is God!
- Jesus rode in to proclaim no I am actually going to reveal what is Good and who is Good by revealing Love and fulfilling Zechariah 9 *He will make peace with the nations.*

And that is exactly what Jesus did...He answered the cry of every human heart who were convinced they were forgotten who longed for justice, goodness and peace.

- He revealed a kingdom dramatically unlike the oppressive and violent empire.
- His parade ended where He knew it would on a cross where He would be ‘raised up’ and purchase for every man woman boy and girl freedom, peace and justice!

Two processions. Two kingdoms. Two symbolic journeys into Jerusalem. Stallion or donkey? Which will I choose?

- Beloved the March for Power has a long an ugly history of calling good evil and evil good.
- The Power March can be seen not in just the obvious places like military parades but in the work place and watch this even the Church house when power is used to get a job completed.

Today is March 24 the day before the final day of 3rd and final March from Selma to Montgomery Alabama - March 21-25, 1965. The first march was led by John Lewis on Sunday March 7 a leader of the Student nonviolent Coordinating Committee who conceived the idea of leading a nonviolent 54 mile march from Selma to capital of Alabama to call attention to the need for right to vote for African Americans. John Lewis and the 600 who were with him were violently attacked, hit with firehoses, beaten and arrested by law enforcement for what was labeled an unlawful gathering - the day is remembered as bloody Sunday.

3 weeks later on March 21st, following President Johnson’s call to congress on March 15 to pass the voting rights act (it was enacted on August 6, 1965), Martin Luther King with host of other leaders crossed the Edmund Pettus bridge this time protected by Federalized National Guard troops - 5 days later concluding the march on the steps of the Capital of Alabama in Montgomery.

As I was thinking and praying about this message - I find it fascinating that so much of my own journey has been occupied with ‘triumph’ march’s. Some as I shared while trying to ‘power’ through by ignoring lament or injustice. Beloved I think to embrace the message of Jesus its time we lay aside our ideas of ‘triumph’ march’s. Yes lets remember Palm Sunday but lets remember Jesus call to our living.

I don’t want to get caught up in a noisy crowd **that ignores the actual voice and life of Jesus - Jesus -** who was walking with John Lewis on Sunday March 7, 1965. How do I know that? He is the one who said *blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice/righteousness for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.* **The March of Jesus is to live day to day the radical culture of love -**
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*he proclaimed by requiring that his followers forego vengeance,
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- Beatitudes - Matthew 5:2-12 TPT
- Beloved the beauty, wonder, connection and community that marked the Garden is most revealed when we realize that Jesus is not just inviting us to a better version of the life as the world has known it - but of life as God knows it and He described it. Where we agree with what He called good and the good life.
- Matthew 5:43-45 Where I lay down judgment and I forgive and bless my enemy.
- Matthew 7:1 ...I refuse to be a critic...

The March of Jesus that ends at a Pole.

- Jesus knew that His March into Jerusalem would bring Him before the authorities. He knew that the outcome would end on a Pole called a Cross revealing both what is killing us and what can heal us - removing every shred of hostility by taking all of mans hostilities onto Himself - by being raise up on a Pole called a cross He made peace and became our Peace.
- Then when He sent His friends He said you ***go and proclaim Peace*** but also know that following me - means following me to a Pole called a Cross.

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Here is a challenging Franciscan prayer (word for blessing = revealing – to see)

Closing Prayer

"May God bless us with discomfort — discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts. May God bless us with anger — anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace. May God bless us with tears — tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy. And may God bless us with foolishness — enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done."

Communion

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