

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Today is Palm Sunday,..... as you may have guessed.

Jesus road into Jerusalem on a donkey, as a crowd of people made a path of palm branches and their jackets,.... and that about sums it up.

So, Kevin, let's sing a song and go home. :)

Oh wait,..... there may be more to this than just a nice parade before Easter. Obviously, this was a big event.

This was Jesus' first time to THE City. His message and ministry was on the line, and the first reaction ...was encouraging, even though most behind the big walls of Jerusalem were Not sure what he was about or who he was.

Some considered him a great teacher or rabbi.

Some hoped he was the promised Messiah of Biblical lore, and that he would become king.

Many thought he was a prophet, and that he had come to Jerusalem to prove it.

Whoever he was, it could not be denied that he was a rising star. He was pretty famous, and on this special day, all eyes were on him – the man.

We humans often act like pack animals. We seem to want an alpha human to follow—who has proven worthy of our allegiance.

Most... want to be lead. Most want someone to be a saviour / to solve the problems and take care of things.

I've been asked to respond to a number of surveys, and I get real annoyed when the question is "Which candidate do I think is the strongest leader?" I DON'T want a strong leader as Prime Minister.

We live in a democracy. We don't need a strong leader, yet that seems to be a big issue. The majority of people seem to desire a person to lead them,..... to save them.

We tend to focus on Jesus with that same regard, as if he is a candidate for that position.

More than likely, the people of Jerusalem viewed him as a candidate – one who must prove worthiness in order to receive position and power.

There was a perception that Jesus was running for a position.

So, I wonder..... what it would have been like if one of Jesus' disciples was a campaign manager. ?????
For ease of labelling, let's call Judas the campaign manager.

Here is what it may have looked like:

As they approached Jerusalem, Judas gathered his committee together for some preparation, saying, "The timing is great. It is Passover week; the people will be in festive mood. Plus, the Nano poll has Jesus' rating very high, now. People are fed up with Herod's brutality and corruption, and 80% of the population despises Roman rule, if asked secretively.

So, ... the timing is good,..... we just need to set the stage.

Front men were sent into the city to hand out leaflets that said, “Don’t miss Jesus of Nazareth. Come to the gate and see him perform miracles and hear his platform.” The front men spread the word, arranged for palm branches, and went to the thrift store to get extra jackets so that no one would hesitate to lay one down before Jesus.

Jesus overheard the tale end of Judas’ plans: the part about having security guards screening those who could come.

Jesus firmly told Judas, “Everyone is welcome to hear my message. Don’t hinder anyone.” Judas jumps in by saying, “But you are a Jew.” Before he finished, Jesus countered, “Were you not listening? Jews, Samaritans, women, Gentiles, children.... it doesn’t matter.”

Judas reluctantly concedes, and then tells Jesus, “I’ve arranged for you to ride a white stallion, and I was thinking about getting a chariot, too,... and maybe an honour guard, Okay?”

Jesus softly answers, “I’ve already taken care of that. I have a donkey and a colt.”

Judas looked shocked, but then he recalled something in the Scriptures that suggested the Hebrew, servant King would come with such animals, and so he nodded in agreement, ... thinking, “Jesus is sharper than I thought.”

The crowd has been pumped up and is ready with branches and jackets to toss, and just before Jesus rides through the gate to the city, Judas hands Jesus a script for a speech to give right after he arrives.

All goes well, EXCEPT..... Jesus didn’t do a thing! He acted like a tourist, or worse.... a pilgrim. Jesus glances around, and according to Mark, leaves to spend the night in Bethany.

There was NO speech, NO miracles, NO promises ...and no declaration!

As the text states, “The City was in Turmoil?” No one knew what was going on. They wanted clarity about who this Jesus claimed to be,..and so they were left to assume that he was a candidate for the position of “prophet”..... others hoped he came to claim the throne as King.

Jesus did not say a thing about himself, and this was his big chance to clearly present himself, but he didn’t.

Judas was appalled, but then thought... “Okay, it’s okay to keep the people guessing, after all Jesus did create quite a buzz. Anticipation is fine, for now.”

That night, Judas was busy contacting people. He was making arrangements for a leaders’ debate. Caiaphas would be one, Herod... another, and of course the Roman leader, Pilate, but he didn’t want the leader of the Essenes included. That would make things too messy.

Oh, Judas remembered, “We better have the debate in two languages: Aramaic and Greek”. But he worried that Jesus’ Greek was a little crude.

In the morning, Judas revealed his debate plans to Jesus. Judas encouraged Jesus to stick to short sound bites, knowing people have a brief attention span. Judas stressed to Jesus that he needs to sell himself; he needs to persuade people to support him / to get behind him.

Jesus asked Judas to sit down.

Jesus said, "It's Not about me!"

"Yes, I've asked people to 'believe in me' and to 'follow me', but I meant that they need to believe what I was saying and doing. I've always pointed to God. I've always said it was about true living – God's way / being in a right relationship with God and creation.

'Following' me was living and proclaiming that way.... because I too am a follower: a follower of God's will."

Judas looked perplexed.

Jesus went on, "God is the one doing the saving / the redeeming.

God grants forgiveness.

God is the one reaching out, through me, showing love, grace, justice and peace to all people... in order that they may come to live God's way and be in good relationships with all people and God."

Moreover, when I'm gone, God will empower people with God's Spirit so that they can better connect and truly live as God planned for us to live.

My life, my message is about God. I'm living and preaching God's way.

I'm not the hero. I'm not running for king.

I'M A SERVANT. I'm not the answer. I'm merely presenting the answer.

Judas hesitantly points out that people need a leader. They want someone to believe in / someone to tell them what to do. People want a hero!

And then he asks, "What's wrong with telling them you've come to save them?"

Jesus stresses, "My message, my way of living grace and justice Will save them..... because IT is God's way / following my example is being in union with God. Living without grace, justice, peace and love will bring discord and destruction. God's way through repentance and grace,... is their salvation,.....AND getting THAT across is my message and ministry.

Moreover, if I defend myself, if I present myself as a hero / the rescuer... THEN... I'll be the one worshipped, and NOT God.

I'll become a cult figure, and the next thing you know, people will be hanging pictures of me on the wall. Bookstores will sell *Jesus icons, Jesus key-chains and Jesus night lights*.

The message of being a servant / of living gracious justice and peace in love will be lost.

People could even use my name to rationalize war.

After a long pause, Judas slowly and firmly states, "If you don't get people behind you,.... if you don't gather supporters, if you don't confront those in power with the backing of devoted and organized followers,..... then they will destroy you. Your message,.... 'okay', 'God's message' of

jubilee, justice and all.... is an affront to those in power / those who are comfortable. Why would they surrender all they have and buy into that,..... unless they are afraid of your power?

Those in control / those benefiting from clear cutting the forests in order to grow palm oil plants will not stop.... merely because they want to please GOD. God is too abstract. The focus is on you / you the messenger, and unless you empower yourself and be the hero the masses want, then **You will be crushed!**,..... and they'll come after all of us –your handful of disciples.

Jesus understood what Judas said. He knew the risks.

With soft certainty, Jesus replied, “I am not a candidate for King, for prophet or for any sort of hero leader. I am the light,..... but I'm not the light bulb. I will expose the injustices and the evil,.....AND the path to atonement with God. People must decide whether to love or destroy / to live with God..... or.... be a part of the destruction.”

The next day, Jesus returned to Jerusalem and confronted the injustices at the temple.

He continued to expose the corrupt leaders. He illuminated a different way / God's way,..... and he did NOT defend himself.

Those in power plotted against him. Erroneous accusations were made about Jesus.

It's fascinating how influential personal attack ads are. I supposed we humans are wired for bad news. Like animals, we give more devotion to the threats than to hope. We readily assume the worst, instead of the best.
Interesting.

Like a pack of wolves, the people of Jerusalem turned against him.

Jesus never did garner much support. He did not have an army to defend him.

The people didn't want to risk giving up their affluence / their comfortable standard of living. They cared little about the poor, about social justice, about the golden rule, and about being a servant. In essence, the people failed to see God in the weak, in the little things, such as love and grace,..... and in Jesus.

In few days, people would vote, and Jesus was soundly defeated.

Palm Sunday,..... started so well, so it seemed,..... until people had to decide to change, instead of merely cheering for a hero.