

A TILT IN PERCEPTION

Today is both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday.

We hold onto the celebration—the parade / the excitement / the cheeringas long as we can. We waved our palm branches and sang songs of praise and joy: “It’s been a long cold, lonely winter..... here comes the son..... It’s all right.....
.....Here comes the son.....*Here comes the son.*

Yet, just as a carnival balloon loses its helium, and slowly meets the floor,... our cheering fades, and we start to contend with the week ahead – the reality of the situation – the Passion – life and message of Christ.

I can only imagine the excitement and expectation that existed two thousand years ago.

Jesus was finally going big time. His day had arrived, so it must have seemed to his followers and other hopefuls.

Last November, Millions of Americans shared in a similar enthusiasm – A new leader had arrived, and the jubilant optimism was based on the assumptions and hopes that people had in Obama. His followers, “Knew” what Obama would do..... because they knew him,..... so each one must have thought. And, the future was grand, that Nov. evening.
Obama is just a man, and it is good to hope.

Jesus was NOT a political leader, nor was he JUST another charismatic, itinerant preacher, Yet as with any “Messiah type”, people claimed him as their personal saviour.... because they “believed” they knew who he was and what he would do for them.

And, we don’t appreciate being surprised by what we belief in. We want our investments to be solid, safe, reliable and secure.

Jesus went to the headquarters of his religion.

A banker would go to Toronto or New York.

Catholic would go to the Vatican.

Jesus was bringing it all home—to the heart of his religion– to Jerusalem.

And, he allowed the Messianic fanfare too – with the parade into the city. He even tapped into the scriptural imagery by riding a colt or donkey (the accounts have some ambiguity about which it is).

Most of your Bibles call this episode the “Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.”

After three famous years of ministry, we are presented with the sense that “finally” Jesus is beingreceived and rightfully appreciated for who he really is. Or, is that the case?

Regardless, the narrative is full of excitement and celebration,and every year on Palm Sunday..... we reenact the parade with our own procession of waving palm branches.

However, noticeably missing is the colt..... and Jesus. Uummmm?

We usually have a baby Jesus in our Christmas pageant,.... yet.... things are getting a little complicated at this juncture in our theological message,..... and well..... who wants to “rain on a parade” with all the details?

So, we celebrate the positive spin, and leave it at that. After all, most people want to feel good..... Most people want the pain to go away, and..... they want a saviour to do the work of a saviour,.... period.

The demanding side of Life is hard enough, so we want our options to be “entertaining” / upbeat / easy to swallow and comforting,.... and church is usually viewed as an option.

The Mega-churches are huge because they provide the product the people want, and that is well documented.

A lot of people go to church to get a feel good fix, and some churches are willing to provide that product, regardless if it is trustworthy.

So, some people will skip over Passion week, others will pause to sing victory songs on Good Friday as if they just won the lottery,.... and a few will linger on, through the week..... to see what Jesus was seeing.

I hope we can be those who linger after the parade is over.

I hope we are those who wonder..... what happened, how did things change so quickly in less than a week? On Sunday, everyone was happy, and by Friday things got real ugly.

I hope we are strong enough to wrestle with big questions.

I hope we can live with ambiguity / with the grey / with uncertainty.... because some questions can't be answered,..... but life goes on. And, that is the truth!

AND, I hope the murder of Jesus makes us sad, and not glad.

I believe that we are people who want to err on the side of truth,..... well.... at least most of the time.

But, we do keep searching.

I'm sounding a bit defensive, I know. The Anabaptist perspective is definitely a minority confession. Much of the time, we are swimming against the current – we are not with the popular culture, and sadly that often includes other churches, too. In other words, not everyone agrees with us or continues the journey with us.

Yesterday, I met with the MC Sask. Peace and Justice committee, and we talked about many things that concerned us. We struggled with being bold and prophetic, yet not wanting to upset people, either.

Our province's choreographed move to embracing nuclear energy is a big concern. We know the hazards. We know that nuclear is not a clean energy source. We know that it will end up costing us taxpayers millions of dollars. We know that the industry has direct connections to the military. We know that part of the push is to enable extraction of the tar sands, and that all feels like a desperate addict fighting for one more fix.

But, we also know how powerful money and the image of success is, and that people in our churches may be cheering Bruce Power on.

As we talked about what to do, it all felt like Palm Sunday – can we simply play the praise hymns like a broken record and ignore the “What next”? Can’t we just be happy and wave palm branches all the time?

But, What next?

What next?

This week, our church will gather for a shared meal on Thursday and communion will be offered, too..... in remembrance of the Last Supper.

We will meet again on Friday for a service of darkness.... Candles will be extinguished symbolizing death. We will not be doing any rejoicing on Friday.

And, we know, the story continues to next Sunday and beyond, BUT We are NOT there yet,..... because we are trying to make sense of each day / each sequence..... and each call to follow Christ.

Perhaps, it would have been easier if Jesus road into Jerusalem, carrying a sword, wearing shinny armour and on a white horse.

Turning over tables in the temple was shocking, **but**.... in a way,... it gave many of us an arrogant smirk,..... Because, we **Know** the mind of Jesus, and those Jews back then were wrong, and Jesus would never do such a thing in our church.....

But, that is really not the issue, either.

What is really troubling is what Paul clarified in Philippians, that Jesus emptied himself and took on the role of a slave. And, in verse 4 of chapter 2, it states, “Let each of you look NOT to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

How are we to Cash in on the Saviour if we are to be focusing on the interests of others?

How can we respect those who appreciate nuclear energy’s argument, and also present another way?

How can we love the soldier, but NOT embrace the soldiering. How can we help those in Afghanistan, without telling them they have to be like us?

How can we sing Hosanna, without demanding “Save me!” Wash me as white as snow.... purify me.... DIE For ME.”.....?

How can we be a follower of Jesus, if Jesus lived for others?

**It is all getting confusing / messy ugly.....

What happened to the Palm Sunday parade?

Something happened..... We thought we knew all about Jesus.

We thought it was all clean and simple.

Jesus would mind his own business and go to the cross and die,..... so we can be saved.

Instead, we keep hearing about the Golden Rule, about letting go of our possessions, about faith living—living in doubt,about being a servant and thinking of others first, and about dying to live???

Maybe that is what happened 2,000 years ago??

People were hoping that Jesus was the lifeboat, but instead he was telling everyone to step aside, think of others, and go down with the ship?

Jesus upset their expectations, and tilted their perception of **what it means to be saved**. And, Jesus went down with the ship.

Amazingly, 2,000 years later, we are still being surprised.

However, didn't Jesus keep saying that his life and message wasn't about himself, but rather about and for God?

Wasn't Jesus trying to help people to know God better?

?????

Could it be that what is truly important is connecting with God / being in a healthy relationship with God?

BUT, relationships are so messy, demanding, confusing and so very "in the moment." Can't we JUST get to Easter? Can't we just get the benefits?

And, why did all that wonderful, lofty talk end up killing Jesus?

Can we pick and choose what we like about Jesus and still call ourselves "followers of Christ?"

Is life about saving ourselves..... or others?

But, what about me?

What about me?

I think it is going to be a long week.