

PALM SUNDAY, "Commitment" (On our way to Easter) .
... John 12: 12-19, 27-33.

Some people say that nothing that we do happens spontaneously or randomly. What happens, happens because we intend it, because we purposefully do it intentionally. That would mean what doesn't happen, or what we do not get around to, we never really intended to anyway! We only do what we really want to do! We might apply that to the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem, against his disciples' wishes.

It was a strange invasion the day Jesus rode into the city. Pilgrims who had journeyed to Jerusalem for the ancient feast of the Passover were everywhere! Right in the midst of them and all of springtime glory, Jesus appeared. The crowd was held in awe! Who was he? They had all heard tall tales of His ministry. They were in awe of His demeanor, calm, compassionate to a fault, and with a deep intent written on His face.

Who is this? Possibly the Messiah? The anointed of God, the Prince of men, the king who is to be? Those alien powers who rule our city may meet their match in this Galilean! So the people worked themselves into the well-known patriotic hymn, "Hosanna! Blessed is that King who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Is He possibly the Messiah? Of course we cannot be sure, but He will do for Messiah for now at least! Tear off palm branches that border the road, wave them high, strew them in His way, spread our cloaks, ride over them, anointed of God! Shout aloud, brothers! Sing, little children! We are a great people! Hail, King of the Jews!" And in the midst of them, Jesus sits, without a word, thoughtful, and intent. What a strange invasion!

It was not strange that He would come into the city this way. It is right out of the prophecy of Zephaniah 9: 9-10... "Lo, your King comes to you, triumphant and victorious is He, humble and riding on an ass- on a colt the foal of an ass." They were all familiar with the regal religious tradition.

But what was strange was that He should come at all, considering how He shunned the publicity and grandstanding effects like this one. Furthermore, He above all of them knows the high danger of all this for Him. If he is offering himself to the leaders who wanted to destroy him, they will not take the bait. He was courting death.

Though the city allowed this for conquering heroes, he had no such credentials, no celebration of victory won. He has no horse-drawn chariot to ride, but the humblest animal of the farm. A Roman victor would be riding in for privileges to be bestowed. Jesus rode in to face His death!

So, what do you see in all this? At least this: a fearless **commitment**, an absolute intention, purposeful and sure. And He could not be deterred. Some say the setting was too good to pass up, regardless of the outcome! Some say the enthusiasm of the disciples forced Him. But as Mark tells the story, He went out ahead of them to their dismay, even as they tried to talk him out of it. Jesus rode right into Jerusalem! He foresaw the peril. Though He was of two minds about it as we see in the agonizing prayer in Gethsemane, He accepted it as His Father's will for Him.

What would you have done? Rather, What do you do when you know you have to face a difficult or even an evil situation? May I offer 3 ways we all do respond.

1. Most of us would say, "Let's stay in Galilee! Just forget it, if that is how they want to play! Why pick a fight? Let a sleeping dog lie!" Most of us would ignore or avoid it! How many men do we know who when faced with the rigors of the life of demanding responsibility just get into a different crowd, one who would rather stay at home and have it their way.

As I turn 60, I am amazed how that never gets any easier. There was a time that I thought my wife wanted to tame me and turn me into a house husband.

Something inside of me wanted to stand up total defiance! Not me, not ever. There is too much fun and adventure happening out there. Instead, all us guys have to do is ignore or avoid sharing the diaper duty, hide in the easy chair, so tired from a long days' work when the dishes are piling up, when the kids need discipline, when the family needs to hear a stern word about keeping its commitments, its beliefs, its values. It is tough being a strong Christian dad for this generation. It is a calling, and many men today just say... well let's just don't try to be so hard on them! They'll turn out okay.

It is not the road Jesus took on Palm Sunday. Jesus rode right into Jerusalem. He could have avoided it, but he didn't- Strong Son of God!

2. There is another road He might have taken. We have all taken it at times. It is much more alluring and flattering to our vanity as well. It is the way of explaining things that are really just evil. **We think we can explain them away.** Explanations are helpful. By them we can gain enormous insight, great help.

Out in the trail when camping out, you encounter the weird noises of the night, the sounds of the forest, the sounds of the deep darkness, you may be alarmed. When you come to understand the little creatures that inhabit the woods, it all seems okay. When you really see the full fabric of it all you can say it is good!

There is a deep truth here, so we attempt to deal effectively with evil in personal situations in the big picture of our common life by explaining them away. I might have explained a recession away like that a few years ago, wouldn't you? "It is always darkest before the dawn, Sit tight and maintain your composure. Just hold on, the pendulum has to swing this way sooner or later."

Jesus comes down into the center of our lives. Imagine Him taking this tack. "Yes times are bad. The Romans are gouging every penny out of us. The whole world is spoiled with selfishness and greed, but that is just the way things are. Some good will come out of it all someday. Something even better stands to come out of all this anyway. Be philosophical. Be patient. Wait and see."

Remember how Mathew said repeatedly, "From that time on, Jesus began to tell the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem!" This is why Jesus was increasingly disturbing to them and is still to us as well. Those who follow Jesus see that 'explaining things away' isn't good enough in the end. It is usually just the beginning, a place to realize what we must do if we are to follow Him.

Good doesn't just naturally and eventually come out in the end, like some mechanical operation. Only God working through faithful people can make things change, and God's faithful people are those who pay a price for His will to be done, for justice to be done, for fair play to be the order of the day, for a good plan to work out well for

all involved, for a church to get along well.

Christ's death on a cross doesn't have any mechanical saving power by itself. We are not saved from our worst to our best just because he suffered and died there. It is when we perceive in the cross the forces that crucify the holy part inside of us, the ability to believe, to strive, and to do all that is an unselfish purpose, to give of ourselves to make the lives of those around us better by our own sweat and blood if necessary; when we see the heart of God in the cross, and realize He reaches out to us in this death to live a life of meaningful selfless service and love; when we see that here is a subtlety about what is wrong in this world that is somehow alluring to us, tempting us to do just a little bit less than our best for Christ, to live just for our own pleasure, that is when we are saved!

When we are stabbed awake and take our stand with him for the refusal to let evil have any foothold in our lives, when we live to let goodness and truth reign in our lives by controlling our thoughts, our tongues, our daily habits, our decisions, our loves, that is when we are saved. Jesus was king that day because he knew evil when He saw it, and He wrestled with it in His own life, and knew he was to be an instrument of God's grace to overcome it.

3. There is, of course, one other road to take, that of **just running away**. "During the meal with his disciples, Jesus knew His time was come, and He became suspicious. With the devil in Judas Iscariot, Jesus excused Himself and slipped out the back, into the night. He was last seen fleeing out the back gate, the very one through which he rode into with all the adoring crowd cheering for Him."

Of course it did not happen that way. "Knowing His time was come, He left the table, girded Himself with a towel and washed His disciples' feet." He didn't pick any other road that day, He proved that for any thing to happen right, we have to **make a commitment** and stick to it.

What kind of commitment have you made to Christ?

Does it change with the convenience of the crowd? Is it so sketchy that if it doesn't seem to fit later on, there is enough wiggle room to reshape it? Does anybody else know about it..... an open clear statement of all that you believe in, come what may? Is it some kind of religious language that you don't really understand, much less anybody else?

What kind of COMMITMENT HAVE YOU MADE TO CHRIST? Like Jesus, can we not dedicate ourselves to live for all that is true and right, that we may live like Him and with Him?

In silent prayer, I invite you to a new dedication, or a renewed one, of yourself to Him.

(END)