

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY COMMENTARY 2007

Sometimes we all just get tired, ready to trade in our crosses, ready to have a church that is less Church and more glory, less testing and more passing, less hospital for sinners and more showroom for saints. Sometimes we don't want Christ's easy yoke instead of the flesh's heavy yoke; we simply don't want any yoke at all. We want the narrow way to be less narrow and the cornerstone less cornering. Sometimes we all just get tired and would prefer a little here and now from the Everlasting Father in place of all His then and forever.

Unfortunately, we should know better. We've not been invited to the circus. We've been called to Christ, the Beggar King, who loses Jerusalem's Messiah Idol to the murderous Barabbas, and rides rental beasts of burden to the torturous tree where He'll bear the burden of all the world. We've been called out of the crowd by Baptism. We've been many times warned that walking behind the donkey can get messy. And at those times when we want a more kingly King and more godly God, we need a swift kick in the backside out of the crowd, back onto the road and behind the donkey.

Now imagine being the One on the rental donkey. How many had promised Him they'd follow, just to find something better to do when it was time to gather? How many hadn't acknowledged the Bible was good for more than decoration, just to skip His highway and byway Bible classes? How many hadn't even given Him a first sentence benefit of the doubt when He preached before zoning out or packing it in? How many spur of the moment voters assemblies of those claiming to be His disciples hadn't gone the way of that first voters assembly in the wilderness that approved the building of a golden calf in Moses' absence, confusing voting on the color of the carpeting with voting on the character of the Christ? How many hadn't wanted candy instead of medicine, a more sugary spiritual diet, like a patient expecting the hospital to be a shopping mall? And the backs of the heads of those people must have looked eerily and staggeringly similar to our own.

His ministry had been a blip on the map of the church yellow pages of Israel. Many other congregations flourished while His at best languished when it wasn't shrinking, as He labored under open skies, with no roof or pews, gave sermons on mounts, with no air conditioning or microphones. As He prepares to die, He can boast a parish not much more sizeable than the original twelve. Yet He kept being the same Pastor, same Shepherd, the same unwanted Savior, because He knew that He had real food for the flock, something to populate heaven and not just pews. He had Bread of Life. He was Bread of Life, maybe not sugarcoated, but sweet nonetheless to those who had experienced the bitter aftertaste of disobedience.

And now it would seem He had His day, finally appreciated, with everyone finally ready to listen and learn, to pitch in and help, just as they pitched down their cloaks to make Him an impromptu red carpet. It would seem. It WOULD seem. But "*Crucify*" was even now in the back of their throats. "*I do not know him*" was already festering in the vocal cords of His boldest disciple. These were the seeds sown on rocky ground that sprout quickly and die, sown among the thorns that grow nicely until choked by the worries and distractions of life.

But that's the thing about crowds. We are by nature consumers, waving palms for the sorriest imitation of a messiah, whether he carries a guitar, a football, or a movie script, while the Messiah rides by unnoticed, or, even worse, momentarily noticed, but then forgotten.

How tired He must have been, how frustrated, ready to hop off that long-prophesied donkey and walk right out of town, to let them all reap what they'd sown! What was it to Him? He'd tried. Lord knows, He'd tried. He'd warned. He'd pleaded. He'd shed countless tears, said countless prayers. At a certain point, wasn't enough enough? Yet our thoughts are not His thoughts.

He doesn't let the cheers get to Him. He isn't fooled. He knows the crowd loves a show, that they are willing to let Jesus be that show for a day, for a season, but that He will be cancelled with time, that this will not be an everyday thing for most of them. He knows some of these same mouths that now hail Him as King will soon hail Him as a criminal, as meat for the hungry teeth of the Roman judicial system. He knows the entire Passion History, even before its written, but He has committed to playing the lead but thankless part of Hero. He rides on. He rides on. He rides on through it all. He just keeps riding, not because He wants this all to happen to Him, but because He is afraid what will happen to you if it doesn't. So He rides on, through cheers and to jeers, to thorn, nail, and spear.

Step out of the crowd. Step out and get behind the donkey. The view is not always as nice, but it is real. The road is not as smooth, but it leads to heaven. The fruits are not as finely polished, but they are eternal. The promises may not always seem like enough, but they hold more promise than all the emptiness that fills our to-do lists and to-have lists, than all the sayings and standards that the mobs have made part of our mentality

Cast down your misplaced hopes and out-of-whack priorities, wave your empty pursuits and shallow desires for Him to take them away, and, as this King passes, as this Pastor of pastors rides by, leave them there, and get behind the donkey, and walk to the cross, and see His Body and Blood offered for you to eat and to drink as most powerful medicine, as the remedy for death, as vaccination for Hell. See His death into which Baptism has buried you, and then witness the miracle of His empty tomb, out of which you too walk with Him through water and the Word to new life. Hear Him speak the sweet comfort He still calls out with clear as day in His Word.

Are you tired? Are you frustrated, ready to be done with all, ready for something else? You'll find plenty of people like you in the crowd, but you won't find what you need there. You'll only find what you need behind the donkey. So step out and follow. It may be bloody, but it is the Blood of your redemption. It may be rocky, but the Rock of Ages won't leave you to walk alone. It may be long, but what else can we expect eternal things to be? It may be hard, but it is easier than a constant striving after the perishable, an incessant chasing after the wind. While you may find your fill of trial, at least the only thing empty you'll encounter will be His tomb.

They may call it the Passion History, but don't let it be history for you. This is your now and forever. This is the past to shape your present and define your future. Amen.