

The Road Less Traveled – March 23, 2018

On Sunday we begin the holiest week of our church year. When we gather on Sunday we will wave our palm branches, we will proclaim “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” and we will mark Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

And so it begins.

A lot of churches don’t spend time on Holy Week. They celebrate Jesus’ arrival into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Then a week later, they gather again on Easter Sunday and celebrate the miracle of the empty tomb. They proclaim Jesus risen and themselves people of Easter. There’s nothing wrong with that, I suppose, but a lot happens in between those two Sundays. Jesus enters Jerusalem that final time to cheers and excited crowds. By Friday, however, those cheers will turn to jeers, those same voices that celebrated his arrival will demand his execution.

For the Disciples, the elation that Jesus finally would allow them to tell their story and proclaim Him the Messiah will give way to horror as Jesus is nailed to a wooden cross and hangs there dying as an enemy of the Roman Empire. Frankly it’s hard to imagine how things could turn so fast, could go so wrong.

That’s why Holy Week is important. It’s the final few scenes in a drama that began unfolding in a dusty stable outside Bethlehem decades before. It begins the final grace-filled act of a God who loved us so much – who sought a real relationship with us so much – that God burst into the world as one of us. It was an act of grace that ultimately cost him his life – and ensured ours.

How it happened, why it happened and what it means for us, that’s what Holy Week is about. That’s why it’s important. Because we can celebrate Easter as the incredible story that it is. But unless we are willing to follow Jesus through this difficult week, unless we are willing to stand at the foot of the cross and own our part in that story, then it will be impossible for us to bask in the glory of the empty tomb and make that story ours as well.

So we take this time. We come together on Maundy Thursday, not just to remember Jesus’ last meal with those who would build His church, but to accept an invitation to that table as the ones who carry the mantle of the church into the future. We gather in the darkness of Good Friday, not just to remember His death, but to consider what it really means when we say “Jesus died for my sins.”

Then and only then are we fully prepared to encounter the miracle of Easter morning.

It’s a few more steps, my friends. They are difficult steps to be sure, but surely the most important steps of all. Join me as this incredible story nears its climax. And let us prepare ourselves to be people of Easter.

See you Sunday ... and let us begin.