

This is Getting Us Nowhere!

John 12:12-19

FOCUS: Jesus' triumphant arrival upends our world's expectation of what God is "supposed" to be

FUNCTION: To look at our lives to see if we are joining the crowds in praise and "going after him" or simply watching on the sidelines

*Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead **continued to spread the word.***

Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him.

So the Pharisees said to one another,

"See, this is getting us nowhere.

Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

Prayer for Illumination

John 12:12-19

*The next day **the great crowd** that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,*

"Hosanna! "

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed is the King of Israel!"

*Jesus found a **young donkey** and sat upon it, as it is written,*

*"Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion;
see, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey's colt."*

At first his disciples did not understand all this.

***Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize
that these things had been written about him
and that they had done these things to him.***

Sermon

My high school band director was not only a tremendous jazz musician but was really something of a sage.

One of his sayings that I has stuck with me,
(and my guess is that it wasn't original,
so maybe you know it too)

Was:

*If you always do you what you've always done,
You'll always get what you always got.*

Wise words about **dealing with challenges**,
the **instinct** to remain in our **comfort zones**
and the **consequences** of those decisions.

For us, it had to do with anything from **practicing enough**,

(i.e., that if we kept not practicing,
we would continue to sound bad)

To how we deal with **conflict with others**

(i.e., that if we kept being argumentative instead of listening,
we would never work through the difficulty with other).

You can apply this to just about anything and find the formula works.

In particular, you can **apply to the Pharisees**.

Those poor Pharisees.

They were the those **super religious folks** who were always **trying to make Jesus look bad** in public.

They would ask **loaded questions** to try to **humiliate** him
They would **challenge his authority** in front of the crowds.

You have to remember,
the Pharisees **weren't bad or evil people** really.

No more than someone
from an opposing political party is bad or evil.

They **took their relationship with God VERY seriously**:

Too seriously as we see throughout the Gospels.

But we know that their **efforts to thwart Jesus** and **undermine**
his ministry through debate and public ridicule ultimately **fail**.

After years of doing so,
the **only thing they've managed to do**
is to **give Jesus ample opportunities** to point out the chinks
in their understanding of God
and particularly, the **nature of the long-awaited messiah**.

After all their effort, they are
not looking at a exposed and shamed charlatan.

They're **watching Jesus march in with a king's welcome**;
parade, fanfare and all.

You have to realize that Jesus wasn't the first guy to come on the scene and claim to be a "messiah".

False prophets were a dime-a-dozen in that day.

So in order to **weed out the imposters**, the Pharisees, **self-proclaimed guardians of right doctrine**, had a **checklist** of sorts that had to be met in order for them to believe that the person before them was actually from God.

The **Checklist** included the expectation that:

The messiah would be a **revolutionary**, who would **overthrow the occupying foreign Roman government**

And **restore Israel**, the Promised Land, into the hands of God's children.

So **Jesus should be leading a war band, not a festive parade.**

The messiah would be one would **wield the power of heaven to bring victory to God's people.**

This was serious business to them.

The Pharisees wanted a messiah!

But Jesus just didn't fit the bill:

Instead of a war horse, he's on a donkey:

The vehicle of a peacetime king.

And his arrival **looks much more like the warm welcome** of a visiting ambassador or king from another land than an invasion.

His **rag-tag band of disciples** didn't look much like warriors either but mostly **low-class, blue-collared fishermen** from **backwater Galilee** and even a treasonous tax-collector is in the bunch.

Sure, they'd **heard the stories about Jesus' heavenly power**,

The tales ("surely drummed or exaggerated") about **commanding the waves and the storms** or

healing terminally sick people

And **the latest buzz**, what he did to that **Lazarus** guy in Bethany not long ago ("surely he was just unconscious or in a coma").

But just the fact he would spend time with the kinds of folks he did showed that Jesus had no sensibilities about proper religious behavior.

He would **allow all kinds of vagrants to actually touch him.**

He would hang out with **hookers and business execs** of his day

Jesus **healed and let his disciples eat all on the Sabbath.**

He spent time with sinners, thereby making him spiritually dirty, technically unable to attend services at the Temple.

What kind of messiah would sully themselves in such a way?

And yet, despite their best efforts

(and believe me, they tried!)

Here Jesus is, marching into Jerusalem
on the holy season of Passover
like he owns the place.

But that's just it:

He does own the place.

He doesn't need to worry about getting into the Temple.

He IS the Temple; the presence of God himself.

The fact of the matter is that he's not the God we would expect either.

We've all got ideas about God

That he's all loving

All powerful

Has pearly white skin and blue eyes

Would vote along a certain party line

That he would still lead us to battle
against our countries' enemies

And often these ideas can really just help keep Jesus at arms distance; safely out of earshot where we can be courteous and Gentile but mutter about how scandalous he is from a distance;

Safely back so his grand ideals won't infect us and make us change our thoughts or perspectives.

We shouldn't feel all bad if any of that is true.

Even his disciples were not able to “understand all this”

As they had yet to see just how far God would carry his plan
(that is, they haven't see anything yet for they haven't
seen the brutal, murderous cross)

A loving God murder his own son?

An all powerful messiah who won't use his glamorous power
to win people over?

A backwoods guy himself, not from civilized Jerusalem or the
religious elite?

None of it fits.

**His closest companions were maybe just as blind as the
Pharisees.**

Didn't Peter try to encourage Jesus not to die after he first
tells them he must?

“No, Jesus! You're the Messiah, the Son of God. You
don't have to die!”

No, it wasn't until after the cross that they put the pieces
together.

How different are we than either the Pharisees or the disciples?

We have the expectations about Jesus.

But do we truly grasp what Jesus is marching in to town to do?
And what's at stake for us?

The city is jam packed for the Passover Feast
(simply, “The Feast” in the text).

This is that **holiest of Jewish seasons** where followers of the God
of Israel, no matter how far, were suppose to **pilgrimage** to the
Temple and **offer sacrifices** to pay the penalty for they and their
families sins.

(A lamb specifically was ordered, but they made
consolations if you couldn't afford one).

And there, the **priests would pour out the blood** of the
lamb,
either the best of your own flock
or the best your money could buy,
so as to pay that debt.

**Couldn't God have just given everybody a lamb,
like a spiritual stimulus package?**

It just shows up right in time to save you the trouble.

No, God does something far beyond;

His only Son, given not just for my sins, but for all sin.

This is the kind of God he is.

Whether this is your first or fiftieth Palm Sunday, I promise you, there is more to this God that you don't know yet.

There is more grace and freedom to be found in him than you ever thought possible.

But only if you are willing to give your life to this unlikely king.

Where are you this morning?

Keeping a safe distance from God?

Too busy to do much visiting with him?

Keeping your relationship with him professional;

A Sunday morning affair?

Or are you ready and willing to praise him with the crowds?

Willing to stand up before the onlookers and show which king you will follow?

Run out to meet him?

This is Jesus is marching to his kingly majesty:

And it's not a throne of gold but of wood and nails.

It will not end in kingly fanfare but mocking and humiliation.

He will not hold a scepter but the ugly sinfulness of the world

Our brokenness, greed, selfishness, hate.

Because that's the kind of God he is:

Utterly loving.

Utterly self-giving.

Utterly unlike anything we could expect.

Today, we have the opportunity to experience the God in a new way.

At the Table, is the chance to see the Lamb of God

And his blood poured out once and for all

So that we might be free.

So let's not do what we've always done. Because we're liable to end up with a nice, sterile God that doesn't really mean much.

Let's go deeper. Let's praise him for who he is.

As a friend said, the crowd proclaims better than they know.

"Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion..."

Do not be afraid to come near and let him be your King.