

For Christianity, there is importance to our celebrating Christmas and Easter. After thousands of years of God working through One people chosen to effect the whole world, through Prophets and Kings, throughout the First Testament; God did something new. God entered into Creation becoming one with us, Incarnate, in the birth of a Savior. At 33 years of age, Jesus came to Jerusalem and suffering and dying he was resurrected from mortal death to Everlasting life. Palm Sunday often has felt like Presidents Day or Martin Luther King Day, important to our history, but what theological importance is there to this? And yet, the events of Palm Sunday are included in all 4 Gospels... Christ's Birth did not make it into all 4 Gospels... The Lord's Prayer did not... The Beatitudes only appear in two Gospels... The Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son only appear in One! Which makes you wonder why this story was so important?

Prior to Vatican II, Presbyterians celebrated Palm Sunday, Cheering with our Hosannas and Palm Fronds; a week later we celebrated Easter's Resurrection with Alleluias and Lilies, with nothing in between. Catholics, Baptists and Episcopalians focusing on the suffering of Jesus had worship services for the Last Supper and Crucifixion, but like the 1980s Musical "The Wiz" Presbyterians emphasizing the Resurrection did not want No Bad News. Worshippers went straight from the Crescendo of a Parade to greater Climax, without questioning how or why.

Prior to the mid-1960s, "Inter-marriage" was description of when a Methodist married a Presbyterian, or Baptist. While Vatican II brought the Catholic Church into the 20th Century, described at the time as "Throwing open the Windows to let the fresh air of the Holy Spirit blow through", Vatican II also enabled all Christians to begin to talk together, to share traditions, and to begin questioning our commitments.

Do you recognize the phrase: "In for a Penny?" No this is not about Penny Ante Poker. There is an old English phrase from the 1600s, quoted in three Charles Dickens' novels: "In for a Penny, in for a Pound". "In for a Penny in for a Pound" comes from a Legal statute at the time, that for Commoners there was no distinction between a Misdemeanor and a Felony... there was no difference in being accused of stealing a Penny, stealing a Pound note, or someone's whole Paycheck. In for a Penny in for a Pound means you need to demonstrate commitment in all things, because they all have the same result.

The dilemma of Palm Sunday is that people on Palm Sunday, at the start of Passover, cheered Jesus "Hosanna, Blessed is the King of Israel, who comes in the name of the Lord!" committing their support of Jesus as Lord and Savior, their highest Authority even over the Roman Legion and Empire! Yet, less than a week later these same people cried out Crucify him, Crucify him, sacrificing him. Jesus did not change in these five days. What changes for all of us in the experience of faith, is people's understanding and commitment to who Jesus is and how significant our faith in God is in our lives.

The key to this whole section of each of the Gospels, comes in verse 11 "As the crowds were listening, Jesus went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the Kingdom of God was about to appear."

Let us back up to set the stage. The ancient city of Jerusalem during Passover is a lot like the City of Boston at the time of the Boston Marathon. The city was overfilled with strangers from around the world, Jews had been dispersed to every corner of the Empire now making a pilgrimage to celebrate Passover in the City of David. Different from Green Valley, there is no Highway where you can go passed at 70 miles per hour; no Frontage Roads where you can bypass different sections. Streets are extremely narrow and twisted, with high stone walled buildings on each side. Every room is rented. Merchants, Musicians and Street Performers gather knots of congestion in the streets, as foreigners gape to observe ancient elements of their faith come to life. This is where Abraham met Melchizedek in the book of Genesis! This

is where Moses had been leading the escaped slaves. This is the Capital City of David's Empire. This is where Solomon built the temple of God. This is where Isaiah and Jeremiah had prophesied about a coming invasion that would disperse Judaism to the four corners of the world.

Returning to the Capital City of the United Monarchy of Israel, even in occupation by the Roman Empire, there is the nagging remembrance from the last of the Judges: the Prophet Samuel, that ISRAEL had rejected following GOD, they wanted to be like everybody else following a KING, and had chosen Saul. So ENTRANCE of the KING anointed by GOD into the City of Jerusalem, was the Parade of a Royal Jubilee.

Throughout the thousands of years of Judaism, celebrating the Passover was central to their religious and ethnic heritage. Our ancestors had been slaves of Pharaoh. God heard their cries and God cared. They sacrificed a lamb to God, shared the festival of Passover, and they were freed from the enemy's oppression. The Angel of the Lord Passed-Over, The Red Sea parted, then God destroyed the army of Pharaoh along with his weapons of war. All the Jewish people were set free by God, and led to Israel, to Jerusalem where they again celebrated Passover as they began a new life free from Oppression. Would this message have been important to the people in Jerusalem occupied by the Roman Legion of Pilate? Does this message ring true for the people of Ukraine this morning?

For three years, Jesus had been gathering crowds by the thousands, who listened to his Sermon on the Mount, who were overwhelmed by an overabundance of wine at a Wedding; who listened then were fed with an overabundance of fish at the shore; they were in awe and did not understand as he healed the lame and deaf, he kissed lepers, he listened to Prostitutes, he cared for and demonstrated love even of Sinners.

Jesus had come through the City of Jericho, that legendary foreign city with Walls to keep Joshua and Israel from entering the Promised land, where a Prostitute named Rahab had hidden spies from Israel. AND Jesus had entered into the private home of Zacchaeus the Chief tax Collector. Coming to Zacchaeus, the Tax Collector had made a scared Vow to give half of everything he had to the Poor, and if he had cheated anyone to return it four times over. With Tax Day later this week, how would you like to receive a Refund four-times as large? Jesus had pronounced a blessing that "TODAY SALVATION HAS COME! FOR THE SON OF MAN CAME TO SEEK AND SAVE THE LOST!" In Hebrew, the WORD for SAVE US is "HOSANNA."

Religious fervor of a new PASSOVER; Ethnic Pride that SALVATION was coming TODAY were palatable, as Jesus led the crowds through Jericho to Mount Olivet, to the Mount of Olives and on to Jerusalem, all chanting and singing "SALVATION, HOSANNA, Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the LORD."

Because of all of this, Jesus told the PARABLE OF THE POUNDS. Different from his Parable of the Talents, this is more edgy: naming that as the NOBLEMAN (The Messiah) GOD was being recognized as their KING, Citizens rebelled against his being their King. The stakes of this contest are that either the KING will be Sacrificed or the People will be.

AND YET, the Nobleman is SO GRACIOUS as to disperse his 10 POUNDS of Wealth among his servants. There is confusion in the text, of whether there are ten servants or three, ten Pounds or Three pounds, but in for a Penny/in for a Pound, this is irrelevant. While similar to Jesus' already well known Parable of the Talents... this story specifically names

1. There are those who care and will receive this blessing and use it, caring for others.
2. There will be those who fear the wrath of the King, believing God to be unjust.
3. Behind the scenes of this Parable is the reality that there are those wanting to Sacrifice the King, even if the alternative is sacrificing everyone.