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“Why are you doing this?”

“Why are you doing this?” These are the words Jesus already knows will be asked of us. As he says to the crowds, from our reading just a moment ago, as we participated in our procession of Palms, “If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” But, why are we doing this? Why does any of it matter? I mean we all know what’s going to happen, why go through the emotional whiplash of this day, as we move from songs of praise and joy in our courtyard where we proclaimed “Hosanna in the highest” waving around our palm, to no sooner shout out words of condemnation, as we will in just a moment, exclaiming “Crucify Him.” Why go through all the motions of Holy week, the last supper, the foot washing, the crucifixion, the liminal time in the grave, when we could just skip to the good part next Sunday.

It is interesting to note that Scripture, in its beginning, was not something that was read per say (I mean many in the very early days of scripture, like 4,000 years ago were illiterate), but even during Jesus’ time, scripture was less a thing to be studied, and more a thing to be enacted. Making our holy scripture not like a traditional book, but much more like a script. In this way the familiar passages of the Bible could be fulfilled in the present moments they were brought to life. In order that they might be more than a story of old or a prophecy for the future, and more like something lived into, right here and now. Just like the story of exodus, which was and is still reenacted during passover. As our Jewish brothers and sisters, and us as well, are called to both remember God’s salvific act of mercy and justice for the Israelites long long ago, but also reminded how we are to act in the same ways towards our neighbors today. Bringing to life and fruition the sacred stories throughout our Bible’s in which God saves God’s people over and over and over again. Not as a one time event, or something that happened then and there, but now as a living breathing enactment that we are invited to take part in.

Some believe that this is exactly what palm Sunday was all about. As Jesus embodies Zechariah’s prophecy, of a long awaited king, entering the city in humility on a donkey and declaring peace, as he comes on the scene by way of the MT. of Olives, fulfilling the prophecy of old. Here, on Palm Sunday Jesus, and us just a moment ago, brought to life the scriptures, and took on the form of street theater. And, the crowds all joined in as they recalled Psalm 118, shouting out with words of joy “Hosanna in the Highest.” Waving around their palm branches before him, just as Moses instructed during the festival of Booths (from Leviticus). As he called for the people to remember the leafy branches that made up the makeshift shelters needed during their time of exodus. Signaling to the people, that like Moses, Jesus will now deliver a new era and freedom from bondage. And so, it is here, as the crowds enact and enliven scripture, and as we do the same, that they, and us, begin to take part in God’s story of salvation, giving way to Divine hope and love.

But, it also gives way to our understanding of how and why these same crowds would come to turn around and condemn Jesus. Because well the kind of salvation he came to usher in it wasn't the kind they had hoped for. For the Jews of Jesus' time their hope was for "The Day of the Lord," which they believed would be a military uprising, that would be their deliverance once again from their oppressors, this time being the Roman Empire. But when Jesus fails to deliver on their expectations, they fail to support his cause and his life.

There is a lot about the Passion reading, and Holy Week itself, that is hard to bear. Even if we already know what happens on the other side of the trial, crucifixion, and death of our Lord. And so, "why are we doing this?" Why not just simply skip to the good part, instead of wallowing in it for an entire week? Well, I would argue, because it is important that we remember and continue to participate in this story because lest we do, we are liable to continue on the same path over and over and over again. Failing to see the saviors, the hope, and the good news that is all around us, and quite possibly being enacted right in front of us, right here and now. It may not be the hope, the good news, or even the salvation we had expected, or dreamed of, or even prayed for. But, if the same God who put a rainbow covenant in the sky, freed the Israelites from the Egyptians, and sent his only Son to live and die and rise again as one of us, is the God who is still working out salvation here and now, then we would do well to find ways to continue to participate in the story and remember as Jesus said, "why we are doing this?" "Because the Lord needs it."