

A Pandemic and a Parade

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Each morning as the sun plants her morning kiss on the earth, I gaze from my window at the beauty of nature. Across the lawn of green through a wooded field, the deer, racoon, fox and opossum, munch on that day's bounty. Squirrels gather their nuts, cardinals, sparrows and an occasional robin flit about. Some mornings, I can hear the mourning dove, and on rare days, a woodpecker breaks the morning quiet.

Through the trees, there is a constant row of headlights, more visible in winter, but nonetheless aglow, even with the leaves on the trees. A beeline of cars form a parade along the hectic state highway behind my home. From the first breath of daybreak until long after my second cup of coffee, cars whiz by with people on their way to work and school. For the past 22 years, this has been my morning vista.

Until there were no cars.

These past few weeks of self-isolation has brought the procession to a near halt. Random cars appear, but there are few. Their headlights, a lone beacon, reminds me of the horror of death the pandemic is bringing to families across our globe and in neighborhoods nearby.

There are some who don't believe it is as bad as the news reports would lead us to believe. Many are terrified that they'll be next. Most all of us are naturally concerned for our own well-being and that of our loved ones.

These dark days of fear are not new. Throughout history, ghastly epidemics have plagued populations the world over. We've read about it in history books, but now it's real. It's personal, it involves us.

The timing of this pandemic isn't lost on me. We're in the midst of Lent – a Christian practice of reflection in observance of Christ's resurrection. As a believer, I am mindful of the coming day known in the church calendar as Palm Sunday. It is the celebratory day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.

"The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"
Matthew 21:9 (NIV)

Jesus rode into town on a lowly donkey as a symbol of his humble place of service, not an imposing king. His entrance into Jerusalem takes on the tone of a parade. Many Jews were in the city to celebrate Passover. Some of them had seen his acts of healing and heard about Lazarus returning from the dead. They'd heard Jesus preach the good news and were eager to praise and worship him.

The people created a spectacle as they threw down their cloaks along his path. They waved palm branches in recognition of his royalty. They didn't fully understand his mission, but they expected him to be their Messiah – the one to save them from Rome and restore Israel.

When Jesus arrived in the city, he was appalled to see that the temple had been made into a marketplace rather than a place of worship. He challenged the money mongers, driving them out.

“Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nation’s’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” Mark 11: 17 (NIV)

He went about town telling people about the Kingdom of God and shared God's love for all people. He used parables and stories trying to connect the idea of a loving and forgiving God. He healed the sick and worked to instill his most prominent message: to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself.

When asked which one of the laws was most important, Jesus replied:

³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. ³¹The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.’ Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)

These are the words we need to remember as we seek comfort during these dark days of the pandemic. Let's remember God's love and how he shows his love for us. He uses people and circumstances to teach us, speak to us, and guide us.

When bad things happen, it's human nature for us to question God. Why Me? Why them? Perhaps the question we need to ask is, what is God's purpose in this – what am I supposed to learn?

When Jesus died on the cross, his disciples were devastated. They didn't understand God's greater purpose. All these years later, we're facing unprecedented problems and we're feeling pretty low; we don't yet know God's greater purpose.

Rather than worry about the unknown, let's focus our thoughts on God's purpose for this event in our lives. Instead of fretting about being restricted in our movements, let's remember God's love and ask God, what should I be learning during this upsetting time?

In our days of self-isolation and personal distancing, let's be kind to one another. Let's show the love of God through our actions, words and deeds. The parade of Palm Sunday was a precursor to the dreadfulness of crucifixion. Yet, God had a greater purpose in mind with resurrection.

Remember, Easter is coming soon!

