

When I think of Jesus going into Jerusalem that first “Palm Sunday,” it strikes me how *alone* he seems.

It is a pitiful parade, really, this entry into Jerusalem. Not even the Jewish historian Josephus, who chronicles at least *some* of the Jesus story, makes note of it, and the people of the city probably weren’t even aware of this so-called “Triumphal Entry.” Thousands of pilgrims were coming to Jerusalem for the Passover, but this little group (which, even though Luke describes it as a “multitude” was probably not all that large, scholars tell us) was just one of what can presume were many.

So here was the Holy City, with its great population of people, not even *noticing* Jesus. Here were the streams of visitors, singing psalms as they entered the gates, totally *oblivious* to Jesus. Here were the disciples, looking up at the city’s buildings and overwhelmed by the show of military might put on by the occupying Roman army, and perhaps even *they* hardly noticed Jesus.

Doesn’t it strike you how – even in the middle of all these people, and all this noise – Jesus seems so *alone*?

I’ve seen such aloneness many times in the course of my ministry. Quite often, when I have been at someone’s bedside as they were in the process of dying – despite the presence of family and friends – despite the saying of prayers and the reciting of Scripture and the speaking of words of love and devotion – there comes a moment when it seems a person moves beyond all that. Even surrounded by those they love, there is a kind of *aloneness* that comes upon them.

Just like Jesus was *alone* as he entered the city that day on his way to the Cross.

Aloneness. Most of us don’t like the thought of being left alone. And yet, here on Palm Sunday, aloneness is what Jesus experiences.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes about a Sunday morning at a church she served when the snow began to fall. It was a pretty bad storm. Not a soul showed up for worship. There was just Barbara and her associate. They sat there in the sanctuary for a long time, thinking about what to do. Somewhere along the line, one of them remembered the Scripture passage from the second chapter of First Peter about the way all of us are

priests whose job it is to offer pleasing spiritual sacrifices to God. Note the last two words. Not to ourselves. Not to others. But to *God*.

And so, in the quiet of the empty sanctuary – all alone – Barbara Brown Taylor and her associate conducted a full liturgy aimed at an audience of One – God Almighty. They read the liturgy, sang the hymns, prayed the prayers, read the Scripture, preached the word, administered the Sacrament – all for no one other than the One they could not see, but knew was present. And when it was over, Barbara was awestruck by the power and healing that came upon her life through that worship experience!

Perhaps being alone isn't all that bad. Perhaps being alone is actually...a gift.

It is often only when we are *alone* that we become aware of the most fundamental relationship in life. For when you strip away everything and everyone else from us – our work, our careers, our families, our possessions, our dreams, our values, our hopes, our strength, our health – there is one thing and one thing *only* that remains: That audience of One – the God who gave us our lives in the beginning – the God who will receive our lives in the end. Barbara Brown Taylor discovered that on a snowy, winter day.

I cannot imagine how Jesus could possibly have dared go into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday long ago without believing that even when his friends had all run away, even when he was stripped of every possession and every shred of dignity, even when he was beaten by the soldiers, and even when he was led out to be crucified on the cross – when everyone and everything had been taken away from him – there would still be a Friend who hadn't given up on him. There would be God, faithful and true! You see, this is often what life comes down to – you and God standing against the troubles and storms of life together.

I don't know what you are facing in your life right now, but I do know this: the God who made you *loves* you, the God who loves you is *with* you, the God who is with you will *see you through!*

All you have to do is look at Jesus in his aloneness today, riding even into death itself, and yet finding grace for living along the way, and confidence in that audience of One to keep him safe. Playing your life to this audience of One will bring you true fulfillment, and will give you strength for contending with the realities of life as they come.

And then one more thing...

When you play your life to the audience of One, you will discover new direction and guidance. I'll have more to say about that on Good Friday. But for now, think about it... If Jesus had played his life to the audience of the *crowd*, he would have chosen *coronation* rather than *crucifixion*. If Jesus had played his life to the audience of *himself*, he would have done anything to avoid the cross.

But Jesus chose another path. Jesus stepped into the unsettled darkness of Holy Week not because the people wanted him to. And not because he himself wanted to. No, Jesus walked into Holy Week and all that lay ahead not to please others, and not to please himself. Jesus marched ahead because *God called him to do it!*

Only *God* could imagine the miraculous result of what Jesus was asked to do!

You see, other people are not capable of imagining what your life can be and accomplish! You yourself cannot cast a vision high enough for all that your life can mean to the world! Only God knows who and what you can become! Only God can make a life!

So stop listening to others! Stop listening to yourself! *Start* listening to the audience of One!

As you come into Holy Week, would you take some time to be alone? Break away from the noise of the crowd, and the swirl of your own thoughts, and find a way to be alone with God. Be alone with the audience of One. And find fulfillment there. A God who gives your life direction there. All alone. You and God. Amen.