

In our social-media obsessed culture, we assume that everyone wants to be in the spotlight. Everyone wants attention. That's what Facebook, Instagram and TikTok want us to believe. But being the center of attention can be exhausting and isolating too.

Actor George Clooney said in a recent interview, "There are restrictions to this kind of fame. I haven't walked in Central Park for 15 years. I'd like to, you know?"

And actor Johnny Depp said in an interview on the *Today* show, that "Being Famous" is a little bit like living like a fugitive. To get you into the hotel, to get you out of the hotel, to get you into the restaurant, to get you out of the restaurant. **Fame is a double-edged sword. There are benefits, but also there is often a price to pay that not everyone sees.**

In our Bible passage today, Jesus is making arrangements to enter the city of Jerusalem for Passover week. He knows he can't just enter quietly, anonymously. He realizes, too, there has to be some sort of strategy. Too many people have heard about his teachings, how he confounds the rules of the Pharisees and the arrogance of the Sadducees. How he's not afraid of the religious leaders or the Roman government. Too many people have heard about his miracles such as the feeding of the 5,000 and the healing of the man born blind.

So the crowds are primed and ready for a show. Instead of the "Rumble in the Jungle," they're expecting the "Tempest in the Temple." As word spreads through the crowd that this Jesus from Nazareth is coming to town, the people throw down palm branches in his path—symbols of victory and peace—and shout ***"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"***

The first word that comes to our mind for Palm Sunday and Holy Week is Hosanna. *Hosanna* is an old Hebrew phrase that means **"Please save us!"** It's a cry for help. The crowds of people lining the streets of Jerusalem this day were shouting it joyfully. They had heard of Jesus' teachings. Many of them had seen his miracles. This was clearly the right man to challenge the power of Rome and restore the throne of David. They were ready to welcome Jesus as a new political and religious leader. **It reminds me of this quote from author John Naisbitt: "Leadership involves finding a parade and getting in front of it."**

Jesus wasn't looking for a parade. The parade was looking for him. **The first day of Holy Week is celebratory.** ***"Hosanna! Please save us!"*** Unfortunately, it is all downhill from there.

By the end of the week a mood of hate and hostility has supplanted the mood of Hosanna. Hate and hostility are two themes we are very acquainted with in today's world. We see it in the Middle East and many other places in our world, but we also see it in our own hearts. It should not surprise us that people sometimes responded to Jesus in the worst possible way. People were rarely neutral about him. What was there about Jesus that some were willing to die for him but others would not rest until he was in the grave?

Even his own disciples betrayed him, denied him, and fled from him. Ironically, he never turned his back on any of them. He came to save the most hostile and hateful, whether it be the thief on the cross or Judas Iscariot who betrayed him. Jesus embodied the Amazing Grace we celebrate in song. So why is the world so hostile to Christ? How did we go from the palm branches and parades to the crown of thorns and the cross?

The world is hostile to Jesus, first of all, because of who he says he is. Notice that members of the crowd referred to Jesus as "the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." Throughout history, people have laughed at prophets, ignored prophets, persecuted prophets. But Jesus never claimed to be a prophet. He claimed much more than that. He claimed to be God in human form. "When you have seen me you have seen my Father" (John 14:9).

Life would be so much simpler if we could just make Jesus into whomever we want him to be. He could be a prophet, a guru, a role model, a buddy. ***But Jesus made the truth crystal clear: "HE IS GOD: Incarnate.*** He made our decision crystal clear too: **take up our cross and follow him**—or ignore him, reject him and miss out on the blessings only he can provide.

That's what Judas Iscariot chose to do. *Judas followed Jesus, worshiped with him, ate with him. Judas heard all his teachings and witnessed all his miracles. And Judas still betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.* **Betrayal by someone you think to be a friend is one of the most hurtful experiences in life.**

William Tyndale was a Catholic priest in the early 1500s in London who had a passion for translating the New Testament from the Greek language into the English language, so that the common man and woman could read the good news of Jesus Christ for themselves. But the bishop of London refused to let Tyndale make a translation. So William Tyndale traveled to Germany, where he made his translation and then smuggled the English New Testament back into England.

King Henry VIII and authorities from the official Church in England tried to hunt him down and arrest him, but Tyndale was able to hide from them for eleven years as he refined his translation and passed it on to others.

But William Tyndale had his own Judas. Tyndale had no idea that one of his friends, Henry Phillips, was actually working with the authorities who were trying to stop him. Phillips worked hard to gain Tyndale's trust. The two men shared meals together. Tyndale even trusted Phillips enough to let him see the translation he was working on. That was a mistake. In May 1535, Phillips arranged for guards to arrest William Tyndale while the two men were out for a walk. **In Oct. 1536, William Tyndale was executed for heresy because he dared to translate the Bible into the English.**

Judas betrayed Jesus in the same way that Henry Phillips betrayed William Tyndale. And when he finally realized what he had done, Judas Iscariot threw the money he received from that betrayal on the floor of the temple and went and hanged himself. Judas faced the same choice each of us face when we are confronted with the reality of who Christ is. **We can ignore him, reject him or receive him. Only those who receive him can experience the blessings Christ can provide.**

The world is hostile to Jesus, first of all, because of who he says he is.

The world is also hostile to Jesus because of what he intends to do. He intends to bring God's kingdom on earth. That was the major theme of his teaching—the kingdom of God. That kingdom is about peace, not power. It is about love, not bigotry. It is about gentleness, not about domination.

Remember the prophecy that Jesus fulfilled when he chose a donkey instead of a stallion for his entry into Jerusalem: ***“Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey’”*** (Matthew 21:1-11).

Jesus never used bait-and-switch tactics to bring people into the kingdom of God. He made it very clear from the beginning of his ministry what God planned to do through him. He was coming as the Prince of Peace.

The problem is, it is easier to rally people's energy and emotions around war than it is around peace. War is tangible. War requires weapons and strategy and clear-cut goals, and an enemy. In a war, it's easy to tell who is on our side and who is not.

But peace requires humility and communication and cooperation. It requires putting others' needs before our own. The end goal in war is to conquer your enemy. The end goal in peace is to conquer ourselves. To conquer our selfish, greedy, violent human nature and work together for the sake of God's glory.

Historian Gene Smith wrote the book *When the Cheering Stopped* about President Woodrow Wilson and the events leading up to and following World War I. President Wilson was viewed as an international hero by the end of the war. This was the war, after all, that was fought to make the world safe for democracy and many people believed that day was at hand. In December 1918, President Wilson was greeted by cheering crowds when he visited Europe. He got a hero's welcome everywhere he went. Wilson spent his time in Europe trying to gain support for the League of Nations, an international body that would advocate for peace and prevent devastating wars like the West had just suffered.

However, members of Wilson's own party opposed his plan for the League of Nations. He traveled across the country, trying to gain the support of the American people for this idea of an international arbitration body that would protect peace and freedom. But, like Winston Churchill in Great Britain, the American people seemed to forget what Wilson had

done for them. In the next election, Wilson's party was defeated. In October 1919 he suffered a severe stroke. He never fully recovered.

The primary reason President Wilson couldn't get support for his League of Nations was because it required sacrifice and cooperation on the part of the participating nations. And after a devastating world war, these countries and their citizens wanted to focus on their own needs first. We see the same forces at work in the world today. The world is hostile to Jesus, first of all, because of who he is. The world is also hostile to Jesus because of what he intends to do. He intends to bring God's kingdom to earth—a kingdom of peace, love and respect for all people.

Finally, the world is hostile to Jesus because HIS KINGDOM IS ETERNAL, NOT IMMEDIATE. *The Jewish people wanted to be saved from their immediate circumstances. From the oppressive power of Rome. From unjust laws.* From the sting of being ruled over by a pagan government that didn't honor their God or their society. They wanted to be saved from the sting of a lost identity and the defeat of their holy nation. They gave no thought to the rule of God in their lives, or the priorities of eternity. And when Jesus lost his popularity, when he looked like a victim of Rome and the religious leaders, they turned against him.

The people wanted a flesh and blood king, not a king that offers his flesh and blood. Not a king who conquers by way of humility and submission. They wanted immediate power and an earthly king who blustered and threatened and called his people to war and destruction. They didn't want a heavenly kingdom open to all people. They wanted the glory of immediate security, not the glory of an eternal God who is working out His purpose for all people and all nations for all time.

ARE WE ANY DIFFERENT? WE WANT A KINGDOM NOW, NOT LATER. We want a king who protects our comfortable lifestyle, not one who commands us to care for the hungry and the sick and those in prison. We want immediate security, not eternity. And we try to twist Jesus' words and his priorities to fit our lifestyle. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Let me tell you about one of the most admired leaders in the technology industry today. Sameer Dholakia is the CEO of "Send Grid," one of the world's most successful business email platforms. Sameer's name appears in every list of the highest-rated CEOs in the technology industry. It's interesting. Sameer's colleagues and employees all refer to him as a *servant leader*. **That's an interesting term, isn't it? "Servant leader."**

Sameer credits his mother, who was killed when Sameer was just 15 years old, for teaching him the mindset of servant leadership. There was a particular Indian parable she loved to recite for him. She would say, ***"When we enter this world we all enter as babies with our fists clenched, kicking and screaming and crying. When we leave, we all leave at peace, with our hands open. There's a reason why this is: we all carry into this world a special and unique gift—a gift you clench in your fists as a baby. Your job, the point of your life, is to discover what that gift is and then give of that gift. When you are done giving of that gift, then it will be your time and you will pass at peace."***

Jesus faced the last week of his life with PEACE because he knew that he was giving the ultimate gift, **HIS LIFE, for the salvation of the world.** He left this world not only with open hands, but with nail-scarred hands . . . and it was for us. **He knew that those people who greeted him with shouts of "Hosanna!"** would soon shout at him in hatred and hostility, but that did not deter him. Fortunately the story doesn't end here.

Holy Week ends with one more "H-WORD," but I dare not say it today. It's the Hebrew word for "Praise You, Lord!" I'll let you guess what it is. It's a word reserved for next Sunday. There is an ancient tradition that some Christians follow, that they do not say this word, or sing it, or pray it, from Ash Wednesday until Easter Sunday. **But it's a word of great joy and victory, and I hope you'll be here next Sunday to say it with me as we celebrate Christ's victory over death and the grave.**

But today, with the word is **HOSANNA--"Please save us!"** *Hate and hostility do not have the last word.*

And next Sunday, Easter Sunday, we will celebrate Christ's victory over every hurtful thought, word and deed in the world—HOW?? By SCREAMING OUT THAT SPECIAL EASTER WORD SO THAT ALL THE WORLD CAN HEAR THE GOOD NEWS THAT CHRIST HAS WON VICTORY OVER ALL SIN & DARKNESS. **Meanwhile, as we gather together on this special day, shout, HOSANNA!! Knowing our Lord will SAVE US!!! Amen.**