

O.K. First a question to test your short-term memory. Today is... Sunday. Yes... *Palm* Sunday. That day on which Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as adoring fans lined the streets, showing their appreciation with shouts of acclamation and by laying palm branches down before Him. (Tho' Luke doesn't mention 'palm leaves,' but rather, **“cloaks.”** I'm glad they went with palms instead of cloaks... 'Cloak Sunday' just doesn't do much for me...

But in our observance of the joyous entry of Jesus... not merely into a Jewish town, but into Christian *hearts*... there is another very important **name** for this day. **‘Passion Sunday.’** When we hear that word *“passion,”* we most often associate it with deep emotion, intense devotion, love and affection. But it has a much different meaning for this day. As you know, the word 'passion' here refers to the **suffering** of Christ. Quite a different connotation, wouldn't you say? Perhaps this bears witness to a more modern saying: 'Love hurts.' Indeed, Jesus endured deep 'hurt' ...pain, suffering, and death... because of the 'love' that He had for us...

Within the vast difference of meaning in that word 'passion' lies the 'deep Divine dichotomy' (try saying *that* three times fast!) of this Holy Week. One that begins with praise and celebration... with **love**... and ends with pain and suffering... with **hurt**. A fickle people who are exclaiming 'holy Hosannas' one minute... to the condemnation of 'Crucify Him' the next. And yet, those faithful followers that accompanied Jesus for that 'praise parade' through the streets of the Holy City would prove themselves to not be much better. Jesus' disciples, his closest confidants, would also turn their backs on their Lord. They too would disappoint their Master and Teacher... both by their actions and their inactions. Much in the same way we present-day 'disciples' do...

And so, as we sit at the brink of this Holy Week, we will look back at a few experiences in that very first Holy Week. For the next few minutes, we will look at some of the ways that those first believers **served their Savior well**... as well as the ways that they **let Him down**. And as we do, may we also be mindful of how our own service of Jesus can run the gamut ... **“From Blessing to Betrayal.”**

The first scenario, beginning in v. 39, says that Jesus ***“went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him.”*** (Luke 22:39) The Mount of Olives, on which was located The Garden of Gethsemane (lit. ‘oil press’)...was the place to which it was ‘his custom’ to go. Little takeaway: Even Jesus had his ‘happy place’... that ‘prayer closet’ where he liked to go to ‘clear his head.’ And have it in turn *filled* with the love and wisdom of His Heavenly Father. We ALL need to have our ‘Mount of Olives’ place... that ‘garden’ where we too can go to empty ourselves and be ‘filled’ from the ‘fount of every blessing.’

The **blessing** of this experience is that ***“the disciples followed him.”*** Even tho’ he had just finished telling them at their ‘Last Supper’ together that one of them would betray him... that their respected leader Peter would deny Christ not once, not twice, but three times... even though they didn’t know what lay ahead of them when they left the safety of that upper room for a world hostile to their message... ***“the disciples followed him.”*** They showed their love for Jesus. That even though he acknowledged their potential to fail him, He yet showed his trust in them. A trust that would allow him to tell them, right before they left that ‘Upper Room, ***“You are those who have stayed with me in my trials.”*** (Luke 22:28)

Were these words not ringing in their ears as they walked up the side of that Mount of Olives, reaching the place where Jesus asked them to ***“Pray that you may not come into the time of trial*** (‘temptation’)” (Lk 22:40) Sure didn’t take too long for that ‘prayer time’ to turn to ‘nap time,’ did it? Just when Jesus needed them the most to be there in prayer for Him, they fell asleep. **Betraying** the very trust that He had JUST declared to them...

HOW COULD THEY? Easy. They were human. Just like us. How often do WE ‘fall asleep’ at times when Jesus needs us the most? How often do we fail to pray for ourselves, that we not fall into those trials, those temptations, that are ‘common to all?’ We must remember that we can betray our Lord not only by our actions, but by our IN-action. And YET... no matter when we fail God... not a matter of ‘IF’ but ‘WHEN’... we want to hear those same words Jesus spoke to our ‘pioneer predecessors’: ***“You are those who have stayed with me in my trials.”*** (Luke 22:28)

Then, right in the middle of the chastising of His sleepy ‘children,’ comes the most famous **betrayal** of all time. Judas. Judas, who used one of the most time-honored symbol of

affection, of *passion*, to accomplish one of the most *despised* acts of betrayal. Even Jesus seems incredulous: ***“Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying me?”*** (Luke 22:48)

As I pondered the role of this ‘kiss’ of Judas in the betrayal of Jesus, I remembered the way that love letters used to be labeled on the back where the envelope closure was. Remember, ‘S.W.A.K.?’ ‘Sealed With A Kiss.’ That the message was sealed, brought to a close, with a kiss... a sign of love. Judas’ final betrayal of Jesus was ‘sealed with a kiss’... the deal that Judas made to turn the Savior over to the authorities was brought to a close with a sign of ‘love’... not of God, but of **money... of greed**. Unthinkable, right? That the son of God would be betrayed, thought of less value than some pieces of silver!? OK...Can WE betray Jesus for the love of money? Can we think of money as more important than our relationship with Christ? To work more hours for more income... taking away that most valuable resource of time from nurturing your faith or your family? To hold on tightly to the gifts you’ve been given rather than use in service to others?

So what would the **blessing** be in this scenario? Perhaps the extent that one of his followers... some believe it to be Peter... would go to defend Christ. To take up a weapon (a knife) in defense of their Lord. To go on the offensive, to be willing to risk bodily harm to protect their Master and Friend. Are we to physically injure another for Christ? Of course not. But is not the name of Jesus ‘attacked’ every day? Are there not ways that we are called to ‘defend’ our Lord? No matter what the risk?

Particularly if this ‘warrior’ who sought to defend Jesus was Peter, it would explain why we read that as they ***“led him (Jesus) away... (to) the high priest’s house... Peter was following at a distance.”*** (Luke 22:54) That in the same way that Peter had sought to help Jesus, to be a ‘blessing’ of a friend to him as the time of this arrest, so too did he seek to keep an eye on the his Lord, to be there for Him. Of course, ultimately his **concern** quickly turned to **cowardice**. Peter’s close **friendship** soon succumbed to **fear**. His desires to be a **blessing** turned out to be acts of **betrayal**.

WHY? How could someone who had been SO close to Jesus, such a loyal follower who had seen ‘up close and personal’ His miracles, the compassion, the rock-solid faith, so quickly deny even *knowing* this man from Galilee? We’d have to say ‘FEAR,’ wouldn’t you say? **Fear**

that the same fate that befell Jesus would also await him. Peter feared the 'guilt by association' of being seen as a follower of Christ. What would people THINK about him? What would people DO to him? His were **fears** that would quickly turn to **shame**. Shame that came not just through the **language** that he remembered from Jesus... but more than that, the **Look** of Christ as His eyes pierced deeply into Peter's soul. Shame that would cause a grown man to **weep** deeply, as a child would cry with **deep sorrow** for the way that they have hurt someone they love.

SOOO... as we prepare ourselves to BE what this next week is called... **HOLY**... what are we supposed to do about this 'contradiction' that IS our lives? That we can sing praises and celebrate the life of the Savior one moment... and then turn away from Him and seek worldly pleasures the next. How do we come to grips with our own fickle humanity... that goes from rejoicing in our common identity as disciples *inside* these walls, to denying even knowing our Lord Jesus when we are *outside* in the world. We must ask ourselves, '**How do I continue to strive to be a BLESSING to the Father... when so often my words and deeds BETRAY His Son?**'

As we seek to be 'Godly humans'... speaking of 'contradictory dichotomies' ... the best place to go is to the only One who was '*fully God,*' AND '*fully human.*' **Jesus Christ**. And for me, there may be no verse in Scripture that better illustrates how Jesus represents both God and man than by His 'passionate' plea in the Garden of Gethsemane: "***Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.***" (Luke 22:42)

In His humanity, Jesus did not want to have to endure the terrible pain and suffering that He was to face; in His Deity, He knew that His Father's will was to be done, to be obeyed. Jesus, here illustrates in perhaps ways like no other... well, other than on that Cross... how He struggled with his human frailty and his Divine faith. Jesus' struggle between giving into the weakness of the flesh, and living in the strength of the Spirit was the same struggle that Peter and the disciples grappled with... the same struggle that you and I do.

The author of Hebrews puts it quite nicely of why we can, and must, trust in Jesus to help us in our trials... you know, the ones that He told his disciple to pray they would NOT have to encounter: "***Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.***"¹⁵ ***For we do not have a high***

priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ **Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.** (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus knows our every weakness; yet can mend our every flaw. Jesus is not some distant religious leader... but your close personal friend. One who looks into your soul just as He did with Peter. Because of His intercession on our behalf, we can indeed ***“approach God's throne of grace with confidence...so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*** Let us not dwell on the ways that we FAIL God... but rather, on how Jesus helps us to FIND God. In those words of *Hebrews*, ***“Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess”... through Christ, who turns our betrayal... into His blessing.***

CHARGE: We serve an **awesome God**... one who can take our **weakness** and turn it to **strength**. Just as Jesus took the betrayal of Peter and turned it into the blessing we enjoy today... the CHURCH. If God can use an impetuous, impulsive, inconsistent believer like Peter... how can God NOT use you and me? As we seek to be like those first flawed yet faithful disciples... the ones of whom Jesus said: ***“You are those who have stayed with me in my trials.”***(Luke 22:28)...We do NOT do so alone...