

REFLECTION

It's SO weird to be hearing a story about something we cannot do: Have a big rally in the streets, a parade to gather everybody together and celebrate and shout and clap each other on the back, hug and kiss and throw our cloaks on the road, cut down branches and throw them down. Shout out and spit our praise of the One who comes in the name of the Lord. We don't just tell this story every year, we do something to make it real with our bodies: branches, marching, singing. Today we tell it and see it - without the parade to take part in.

It's SO weird to be dealing with something invisible, too! We are told about something that can endanger us - and endanger others close to us. We try to picture it, we try to imagine it and where it is found and where it might go and what we should do to prevent that - but it's invisible. We have to take it seriously and know that it is real.

And it shouldn't be hard for people of faith to see what our eyes cannot see because we are used to seeing with other than our eyes.

We see with the eyes of the spirit: perceiving spiritual things going on that the eye cannot get at all.

We see with the eyes of our heart, understanding the language of Love and all that is unspoken. We see with the eyes of faith, where God speaks to us through the events and people God brings our way and messages through the way events happen to us.

We see through the eyes of our feelings: when an emotion tells us what we really need to know in the moment.

We should be good at seeing what is going on under the surface.

Something is happening in Jerusalem in this story - and people have come out to see it. Or rather something has been happening on the way to Jerusalem for a long time and it's been building into something unstoppable. In the big city, nobody knows what's been going on outside the. By the time it reaches them, all they can do is stare and ask: Who is He?

But the people from the valley, the villages and the countryside have seen with their own eyes and with the eyes of their heart and spirit. Jesus has come - to heal, to comfort, to challenge, to bring freedom, to preach Good News to the poor of every kind, to usher in the Day of God.

David reminded me of this scripture this morning: (II Cor 4:18) (Spiritually) So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

And not just temporary vs eternal, but what is unseen may be what is really real and what is seen and considered "true" may be an illusion.

It demands that we ask again what is important and what isn't.

To be really present for something that is different, for something that challenges our ways of being and believing requires us to stop and really notice what is going on, on the outside and on the inside of us. But, if you are like me, when you are under stress, you begin to do what you have always done - only more and faster. We speed up the wheels of coping.

My music teacher friend web-cammed me at 11pm to ask for advice on how to set up Zoom, how to send her music students practice notes and how to put up a donate button for the local food bank on her planned weekly FB Live storytime broadcast. She said to me: I am up until 2am every day because I am running and re-organizing my teaching and the home. My husband is a doctor so he lives in the garage. I make him food, do the dishes, clean the laundry. She had the eyes of profound tiredness; I suggested she might put off the FB Storytime and donate button for a bit later...

I get it, though. In the face of the announcement that schools were cancelled (and 100% of my work), I put out a post on FB that I was offering free online ukulele group lessons to children. I have been having a ball. If my wheels were spinning before, they were a blur after 3 weeks. I am aware that I am trying to convince myself that I can control things and protect my own by working harder. (It's a UCC thing)

You know that we go to India once a year, now, teaching biblical storytelling in the south, connecting with the CMCHospital in Vellore TN and living in a Christian school connected to the slum in the Punjab. When I think of parades right now, I think of the people swarming the train stations and bus depots and deciding to walk back home to their villages, because the big city was where they worked, but their heart and homes are really back in the tribal areas.

But in the villages, it is quiet. No-one is allowed to leave their house at all; a food seller comes through the brick cobbled streets of town once a day. Our school is locked-down, too, and our

dear friends Tajinder and Paramdeep who are the house parent couple have taken over the work that used to be held together by a kitchen, cleaning, security and teaching staff. They say the children are mostly experiencing this as an extended holiday, but you can imagine that this is one long non-stop work day on the job for these 2 and some of the older teen girls at the school. They ask the children to not make noise in the courtyard where they play because they were all are supposed to go home by law - but blessedly these children have not gone back to the tents where they live.

Tajinder and Paramdeep have the eyes of exhaustion, but it does not stop them from keeling over in waterfalls of laughter when we share a joke during an evening face-to-face call. They are made of the joy of the Lord. The Jesus parade gathered them up a long time ago and they continue to thank God for His goodness and sustaining grace. Always, they ask for and receive, guidance on their way. In the Punjab, Christians greet each other not with Hello but with Jai Masih Ki - Praise the Lord! And prayers don't begin with lament or asking for help. They begin with Hallelujah Hallelujah! Thank-you - and they stay that way for a long time...

But - here's the thing about that parade: It really wasn't triumphal at all.

Yes, the crowds called out: Blest is this One!

Yes, they said: Take that, you powers of darkness! The REAL king is coming!

Yes, they said: He will save us from everything that oppresses us!

But Jesus... the king receiving the royal welcome of cloaks and branches ... came in on a donkey. Because the glory belongs to God. And our God is the God who up-ends everything that we think we know, that we think we can control, that we want to call our salvation.

My friend Keri Wehlander said: This year we have the opportunity to understand Easter better than we ever have before. Beyond the lilies and chocolate eggs and the decorations, it is so absolutely clear: the hope that is expressed in the Gospel is not a kind of Disneyland story where everything is pretty and the music is playing over the loudspeaker. Hope is lived out in God joining us in the nitty gritty of life, God comforting us in our fear, God meeting us in our isolation, and God guiding us in the middle of the difficult, impossible decisions that have to be made, and God healing and sustaining us right here, even in the midst of death. For those who are willing to go a little deeper into Holy Week, there will be an opportunity to understand it as we never have before.

The ancient wisdom says there are only two major paths that the human soul comes to God: the path of great love, and the one of great suffering. Richard Rohr says they both finally come down to great suffering - because if we love anything greatly, we will eventually suffer for and with it. When we're young, God hides this from us. We think it won't have to be true for us. But to really, really love anything in depth and for any length of time, we will suffer.

That is why we choose to enter a week that we call Holy, and yet will lead us in the direction of a Cross. That is why Jesus chose to enter the gates of a city that aimed to be holy but killed all its prophets. Because of great love.

The real triumphal entry is not the Hero's Palm Waving Welcome that tried to make Jesus the kind of hero we needed him to be.

The real triumph was not the Cross, which God did not need but humans imposed.

The real triumphal entry is the Christ appearing in so many ways, in so many lives, in so many places in this global family throughout all history - showing us the grace and heart of God.

Of course, I have got ahead of the story here. Let's go back to the parade. It's just that, as you make your way through this week and events unfold with Last Suppers in upper rooms, friends betraying and letting others down, devoted followers falling asleep, arrests, unjust trials and crucifixions, you may feel the walls closing in on you a bit. Holy Week is a hard time to be socially isolated. So, let's not be. Allow this week to be one of prayer, of slowing down and of reaching out. (If I can cancel online ukulele lessons for Holy Week, you can do anything!)

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

John Oldham, our hymnwriter who gave us Deep in Our Hearts and Sweetgrass & Candle, he sent this to friends yesterday:

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes

Who comes in the name of the One.

Who comes in the name of Love over hate,

Faith over fear

Hope over harassment

Courage over criticism

Conviction over confusion

In the fusion of grace, love, wonder, wow and compassion. Hosanna!