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MapQuest: Inward Journey, Outward Passion

“Finding Your Passion”

John 12.12-9

John Buchanan tells the story of one Palm Sunday celebration at 4th Presbyterian Church in Chicago when the children were parading with the palms as the congregation sang heartily, “Hosanna, loud Hosanna.” All during the parade of palms, little Anthony about 7 or 8 years-old at the time, got the word right – HOSANNA – but somehow confused the music and the meaning. All during the parade of palms, Anthony entertained the whole congregation by singing in full voice, “Oh Hosanna, don’t you cry for me, I’m going to Alabama with a banjo on my knee!”

John Buchanan confesses it’s hard for him to hear the glorious music of Palm Sunday without hearing little Anthony’s clear and loud voice singing, “Oh Hosanna, don’t you cry for me.”

There’s a tradition in some churches on Palm Sunday for the entire story of the last week of Jesus’ life – what is called The Passion Narrative – to be read. Not just some of the story but all of the story.

Not just the triumphal entry into Jerusalem but also the story of his betrayal, suffering and death.

The reason for this tradition is that we feel so good about the procession of palm branches and singing “Hosanna,” we forget what comes immediately after. The “Let’s Have a Parade” theory for Palm Sunday is preferable to most who don’t quite know what to do with the ugliness of the cross . . . those who would prefer we go straight from

the palms to the lilies of Easter morning and skip what happens in between.

There's a tendency for us to remove the passion from Palm Sunday for as Fleming Rutledge says, "It's not for the faint of heart."

Anne Lamott wrote, "I don't have the right personality for Good Friday, for the crucifixion. I'd like to skip ahead to the resurrection. In fact, I'd like to skip ahead to the version of one of the kinds in our Sunday School, who drew a picture of the Easter Bunny outside the tomb; yep, everlasting life and a basketful of chocolates. That's what I am talking about. That version doesn't ask anything of me. That version doesn't ask me to leave my comfort zones."

It is today, Palm Sunday, that sets this Holy Week in motion and invites us to leave our comfort zones and enter into the heart of this story in the hopes that the story of our lives might be changed.

On this Palm Sunday, we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem. He could have stayed where it was safe in Galilee. His friends tried to talk him out of it. They knew the risks. They were afraid for their own safety.

The Bible says Jesus was determined and he "set his face resolutely towards Jerusalem." Of course, there's the obvious geographical meaning of this verse. He literally set his face from the countryside of Galilee toward the city of Jerusalem. There's another level of meaning as well. Jerusalem is the capital city, the center of commerce, the center of power, it's the center for the Kingdom of Rome which stands in direct conflict with the Kingdom of God! It's the heartbeat of the heart. Jesus journeyed to the heart where the real struggle takes place . . . and challenges us what will we give our hearts to –

So Jesus comes to each of us, you and me, inviting us to journey from the periphery, from the sidelines, where it is safe and comfortable, where we sometimes wish we could stay, to the very heart of things . . . challenging the status quo . . . challenging those places we give power and control in our lives . . . challenging us to choose love over fear.

The story changed when Jesus listened to the tug in his heart and asked himself, “What if I left the countryside and the serene, safe environment of Galilee and traveled to the heart of the city, Jerusalem, for the Passover?” What if I confronted the love of power with the power of love?

I love the author Don Miller who wrote [A Million Miles in a Thousand Years](#). Miller says when novelists sit down to write a narrative, there is a question they ask themselves in order to create exciting and meaningful stories, and that same question can also create a more exciting and meaningful life. That question is WHAT IF?

J.R. Tolkien who wrote [Lord of the Rings](#) asked the question, “What if there existed a place called Middle Earth, and what if Middle Earth were under threat?”

Every story begins with some form of this question, and so does life. (What have been the “what if’s” that you’ve listened to/ignored – what “what if’s” are stirring in your heart even now, challenging you to rise above your fear?)

Whenever a novel starts to drag, the writer simply has to ask this question, and suddenly the story is propelled forward. What if my protagonist won the lottery? What if they discovered a secret?

What if my protagonist abandoned the script others expected them to live out and followed their passion even against everyone's advice?
What if my protagonist was given six months to live?

A series of these questions will dislodge whatever fascinating thing is going to happen next in the story. The question, "WHAT IF" Miller says can radically change our story and our lives.

He says that several years ago, he asked a question that kept tugging at his heart, "What if the 360,000 churches in America could each have a mentoring program?" Out of that question came one of the most exciting adventures of his life called The Mentoring Project based in Portland.

Rick Warren asked, "What if we could provide medicine for every person living with AIDS in Africa?" And from that question millions of lives have been reached with love.

Rotary asked, "What if we could eradicate polio?"

Dr. Ron Carver and a few others asked, "What if we started a voluntary medical clinic providing quality medical care for the worlds uninsured?"

I read this story this week of a six year-old girl who felt her heart tugged when she saw some homeless folks who were hungry. With the innocence of a child she asked, "What if I could feed them?" and she inspired a movement at six years of age that has now fed 120,000 people.

Our church recognizing the growing numbers of young people who will never step foot inside a church to hear the story of God's unconditional love asked, "What if we brought that love into the city where they

are?” And from that question the story of a new church development called Trailhead was born.

Don Miller asks, “What if you asked yourself a series of questions? What if you got out a yellow pad and wrote down a few story turns that you could engage? What if you listened to what was tugging at your heart and paid attention to where you are being called to leave your comfort zone? Where you feel challenged to choose love over fear?

What if you ran a marathon to raise money for a cure for cancer?

What if you renewed your marriage vows?

What if you quit your job?

What if you mentored a teenager? Sponsored a child?

What if you risked being vulnerable?

What if you forgave . . . what if you asked for forgiveness?

What if you stepped off the sidelines and onto the playing field? What if you took a stand against injustice . . . even if it was unpopular? What if you stopped playing safe, listened to your heart and followed your passion?

What if . . . propels a story forward and can radically change our story and our lives.

Jesus asked, “What if I left the safety of Galilee and journeyed to the heart of the city, the heart of power, Jerusalem, for Passover?” What if I confronted the love of power with the power of love?

New Testament scholars, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan begin their book, The Last Week, with the striking observation there were actually two processions entering Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30. It was the beginning of the week of Passover, the most sacred week of the Jewish year.

One was a peasant procession . . . the other an imperial procession.

From the East, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives, cheered by his followers, with a message about the Kingdom of God.

On the opposite side of the city, from the West, Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, left his seaside palace, and entered the city leading an imperial cavalry riding a stallion proclaiming the power of the empire.

From the West comes an imperial parade displaying the love of power, grounded in fear and maintaining the status quo.

From the East comes Jesus humbly riding a donkey, embodying the power of love, willing to risk everything for the sake of that love, writing a new story.

People tired of living in fear under the oppression of the Romans lined the streets and shouted “Hosanna” which literally means “Save us.” They expected Jesus to be a military leader who would set them free by leading a violent revolt. In other words, they expected him to follow the same old script of power and control.

Jesus was certainly coming to liberate and save, but not by following the same old scripts, grounded in fear.

He revealed a new story . . . a story that invites us to choose love, a story that invites us to ask, “What if . . . what if we risked leaving what is safe and comfortable and journeyed to our hearts, paid attention to the tugging of our heart, gave our hearts to something larger than ourselves, offered the passion of our hearts to others . . . what if we abandoned the scripts that have been handed to us by society, by others, and dared to believe a new story can be told.

Here’s a story of a person who didn’t follow the usual script of fear and asked, “What if I choose love over fear?” Julio Diaz lives in New York City. Each night the 31 year-old Social Worker takes an hour long subway ride home. He usually gets off one stop early to eat at his favorite diner.

One night last February, Diaz stepped out onto the train platform and encountered a young man in his teens who emerged from the shadows and pulled a knife on him.

Diaz recalls, “He wanted my money, so I gave him my wallet and told him, ‘Here you go.’”

As the boy started to walk off, Diaz said something in his heart prompted him not to allow this story to end there like so many other stories like it, what if he risked loving in return. He remembered something about Jesus saying give the coat off your back as well so I said, “Hey, wait a minute. You forgot something. If you’re going to be robbing people for the rest of the night, you might as well take my coat to keep you warm.”

The boy said, “What? What’s wrong with you man?” Diaz replied, “If you’re willing to risk your freedom for a few dollars, then I guess you must really need the money. I mean, all I wanted to do was get dinner and if you really want to join me . . . hey, you’re more than welcome.”

Diaz talked the boy into going with him to the diner and they sat in a booth. When the bill arrived, Diaz said to the boy, “Look I guess you’re going to have to pay for the bill ‘cuz you have my money. So if you give me my wallet back I’ll gladly treat you.”

The boy didn’t even think about it and returned the wallet. Diaz says, “I gave him \$50 . . . figured maybe it’ll help him.”

Afterward Diaz asked for something in return – the teen’s knife “and he gave it to me.”

The story changes when we dare to ask “What if . . .” What if I don’t respond in the same old way – what if we don’t play by the same old rules . . . what if we don’t follow the same old scripts . . . what if we choose not to live by fear and risk leaving our comfort zones and we choose love? What if?

Jesus chose love revealing to us a new story is possible – we enter this week to witness a love willing to risk everything for our sake.

We enter this week to witness the passion of a love so uncompromising that it leads to a cross and to hear spoken from that cross words of forgiveness to the very ones who hammered the nails in his hands.

We enter this week to witness a love stronger than even death itself – a love that will set us free.

We enter this week daring to wonder – what if –

Our lives can change – what if the lives of those living in fear can change, what if the world can change – what if we journey from where it is safe and comfortable – and what if we listen to the tug in our hearts – and give our heart to that love that is calling us there!