

What about favorite movies is Inside Out. You may remember it from a few summers ago, in the summer of 2015, it was when it was released. It tells the story of a young girl, Riley Anderson, and we get to see her mind in the midst of her emotions. Five key emotions presented in this film, joy and sadness, fear and anger and disgust. We see how they work together in the midst of her family's transition as they're moving from Minnesota to San Francisco, and she has to adjust to her new life. Part of what this movie presents is the idea that memories are connected with our emotions. Some of them are powerful.

You might imagine in your own life, memories that you have a fear or anger or disgust or joy, but not always our memories or events always connected just to a single emotion. Many times, perhaps they are woven together, and you might find a mix of emotions that make real the memory, that have stayed in your heart and mind over the years.

The same is true for this week that we're about to enter into, in the life of our church. Today is Palm Sunday, the very first day of the most significant week in human history. We enter into it, and there is both joy and sadness, fear and disgust, and all of them woven together in this tapestry that begins today, continues on Holy Thursday as we share a meal together, into Friday, remembering Jesus on the cross, and finally a week from today as we celebrate the resurrection.

So let's go back and remember. What was going on in this day over 2000 years ago? What life would've been like in those times. You remember that Sunday is the Jewish Monday. It's the beginning of the work week. For many people here in the United States, the work week begins on Monday. For the Jewish people at that time, their work week would've began today. Their Sabbath, or their Holy Day, was yesterday, on Saturday. So being the first day of the week, I imagine that people were getting ready for work, there in Jerusalem. This was a normal every day, just getting up, going about your thing morning.

But something was different about this week, that was different than other weeks of getting up and going to work. It was the celebration of the Passover. This is one of the High Holy Festivals for the Jewish people. In this, the holiday, there are hundreds of thousands of people that came to Jerusalem, to celebrate and remember that once they were slaves, but now they were free, that God had passed over them in one of the miracles, that they were released from slavery in Egypt years and years ago. There were probably 200,000 people, scholars tell us, that came to the city during this week, to celebrate this Holy Day.

So when Jesus is entering Jerusalem, there's a bunch of people around. You remember that at the time, that there were a population of 50,000 in Jerusalem. So this is quite an impact. 50,000 to 250,000 is a huge change. There were people all over the place, many more than what had normally been there, and events that are a little bit outside of the ordinary, unusual things happening here in Jerusalem.

One of those things that's happening is Jesus himself is coming to the Holy City, to the capital city of the time, and He comes in a bit of an unusual way. The scriptures tell us that as He enters Jerusalem, He's riding on a donkey. Now, why would Jesus be riding a donkey? He never rode a donkey. He walked and his Disciples walked everywhere that they went. He just walked 90 miles from Galilee to Jerusalem. So why, during the last half mile, does he ask to ride on a donkey into the city?

To begin to get a closer look at that question, we remember some of Israel's history. You remember what that the donkey is the animal that King David rode on, the greatest King of Israel. The scriptures say, as a man after God's own heart, both he and the kings that came after him would ride a donkey. Everyone knew that at the time. So it was a symbol perhaps of a king, of the Davidic line of kings, to ride on a donkey or a mule. The practical reasons, of course, the donkeys were a bit more sure-footed and then the horses in rough terrain, and they had a little bit more stamina as well, but they also reflected on humility. Riding on a donkey was something that someone who is humble did. You didn't have to sit up high on a horse or a stallion.

We also remember that 500 years before Jesus, there was a prophet who wrote about what was happening at this time. From Zechariah 9:9 says this, "Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion. Sing aloud, daughter Jerusalem. Look, your King will come to you. He is righteous and victorious. He's humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the offspring of a donkey."

Why did Jesus ask for a donkey? He was making a statement. He wasn't making a statement that had to do with his faith. It had to do with politics. At the time, he was saying, "I am the Messiah. I am the one that you have been waiting for. I'm the promised one. I am the King that is coming in is here." So he asks for a donkey to enter into, on these last few yards into the city.

The people of Jerusalem responded just as you might've expected. Again, this huge crowd of people, far beyond their normal population, and they heard about Jesus. Word had spread across the city and across the country, and here He was coming into the capital city on this week, this significant week of Passover, and they were hailing him as the Messiah. They saw Him on the donkey. They knew of the works of power that He had done, and here He is in the capital. Maybe he's going to throw out the Romans. We are going to celebrate. They threw their cloaks in front of him, which is exactly what happened in the Old Testament when the kings came into Jerusalem. They began waving palm branches, that were a sign of victory, a sign a victory both for the Jewish people and for the Romans, who at that time were foreign occupiers, in charge of the city.

Palms, you remember, show up on Roman coins of the day, and people were waving palm branches as a sign of victory. The one that they'd been waiting for is here. He is entering the capital city, and it is a day to celebrate. They were shouting the words from Psalm 1:18, which was used on the Feast of Tabernacles, as well as during the Passover, two of the feasts of the Jewish faith. Every Jew would have known these words, and we remember them in Psalm 118:25 and 26, "Lord save us, Hosanna. Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the House of the Lord, we bless you."

This Psalm was originally written for king's returning to Jerusalem from battle, that people would cry out these words when the kings came into the city, and here they are crying out again. Hosanna literally means save us now. Lord, save us. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. These are the words that people are using as Jesus is entering the city. Jesus rides into Jerusalem. People are waving their palm branches. It's a beautiful sight, a royal procession, the return of a king.

Now imagine that you were at a parade. What's the most important part of the parade? Usually it's, perhaps, the last float to come by, or one of the things that had already passed, but usually when a parade is done, oh, you kind of expect things to be over. You pack up things and head back to your daily

life, but in this case something was different. It was a one person parade. There were a bunch of people watching Jesus walk in, but really what was going to happen next is what people were looking forward to.

Some thought that Jesus would lead a military or rebellion and fight against the oppressive Roman government. Set them free, be able to set off the chains of this oppressive foreign power, and they might live again, establishing the house, or the King of David. Some were thinking that perhaps he had something to do with the religious leaders. He'd go onto the tempo and say and do things, which of course we know that He did, and yet it didn't quite turn out quite like they were hoping for, either. Maybe they didn't know what was going to happen next, but felt something in the air.

What actually happened was a little bit unlike what most people were looking for. A few days later, the scripture tells us, perhaps on Tuesday or Wednesday of Holy week, Jesus was at Bethany, visiting the house of Simon, who had a skin disease. During dinner, a woman came in with a vase and made of alabaster and containing very expensive perfume of pure nard. She broke open the vase and poured the perfume on His head, on to Jesus' head. Now what is it that she was pouring on Jesus' head?

Nard is an aromatic. It's an essential oil, and maybe some of you have essential oils, are familiar with them. This is one of them. It was derived from a flowering plant in the honeysuckle family, and this was very rare at the time, growing in the Himalayas and Nepal and China and India. It's been used as medicine and has religious contexts across a wide geography at the time, and as the Disciples often do, they protest at this. Some grew angry. They said to each other, "Why waste the perfume?" This the perfume could have been sold for almost a year's pay and the money given to the poor, but they scolded her.

Let's translated here as almost a year's pay is 300 dinarii. This would have been what a day laborer, would've earned as a wage, maybe \$17,000 to \$20,000 in today's money. This is what has just been poured on Jesus' head. Perhaps you might protest that as well. But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me. You always have the poor with you and whenever you want, you can do something good for them, but you won't always have me. She has done what she could. She has anointed my body for burial. I tell you the truth, that wherever in the whole world the good news is announced, what she's done will also be told in memory of her."

Jesus reminds the Disciples that what she has done is something good, and sometimes in the life of the church that this passage has been used as an excuse for not doing things about the poor. Jesus says, "Well, the poor will always be with you." So some people would interpret that, and say, "Well, what are we supposed to do? Maybe I don't need to do anything." Instead, quite the opposite is true. Theologian Leander Keck suggests that this offering, this one jar of ointment, of essential oils, neither caused nor would have solved their problem of poverty in that day. Jesus said that she has done something good. She has anointed his body for burial. She gets it. She seems to understand what's coming up, where the Disciples, over and over again, do not. She has recognized the truth, without even spending time with Jesus over these past years.

The same challenge is here for us today. Well, one gift may not be the cause of, or the end of all poverty. We're called to do what we can, to help support those that are in need, to provide mercy and charity for those that are in need of it, but also to work against the forces in our society that cause people to not

have enough to eat, to not have a place to sleep. Our responsibility is for us as well, to take action to care for those in need.

The truth about Palm Sunday is that Jesus, exciting and promising entry into Jerusalem, will end with His death on Friday. A few days after this woman has anointed Him with this oil, the shouts of Hosanna would turn into shouts of, "Crucify him," and in his last few days, the Disciples that still don't understand that Jesus' words about death. This woman is one of the only characters in Holy Week that seems to get it. Jesus is going to die, just as he predicted.

The good news for us today is that Jesus' death is one that brings life. When Jesus is anointed by this woman for his upcoming death, it the death doesn't end there. The story continues a few days later, when He is raised from the dead, and this is the week that we're entering into today. This is the week that will end next weekend, Easter when we celebrate the resurrection.

So I wonder, as you engage this story during this Holy Week, do you ever find yourselves like the crowds of Jerusalem, maybe excited to see Jesus, maybe expecting Jesus to respond in ways that we have in mind. Like the Disciples, do you have questions or maybe just don't understand at times? Like the woman who anoints Jesus, how might we also honor Jesus and recognize that we can be a part of God's kingdom, coming on earth as it is in heaven?

We have the opportunity to become more and more in every way like prize and to join our story with God's story, just as that woman, with this one small act, joined her story with God's story. We can as well join our story with God's. Even things that we think is insignificant really can be very significant. Consider the woman in this story. We don't even know her name, and yet wherever in the whole world, the good news of Jesus Christ is announced, what this woman did will also be told in memory of her, just as it is today, right here in Barrington, in Shawnee County.

Will you pray with me? Oh God, we want to be part of your story, but sometimes what we say and do seems insignificant, and so use our lives, we pray. Take our small actions and help them be a part of Your work in the world. Lead us and guide us during this Holy Week, as we prepare to celebrate Easter, a week from today. Give us guidance. Send us strength and help us to follow You. In Your holy name. Amen.