

“Palm Branches and Red Carpets”- Luke 19:28-40

Glitter! Glamour! Gossip: The three “G’s” of the Hollywood red carpet treatment. A few weeks ago, they had the annual Academy Awards ceremony out in Hollywood and if you happen to watch that night, you probably got your fill of the three “G’s” Flashbulbs popped and the paparazzi shot pictures for People, US Magazine, and the National Enquirer as stars walked the red carpet into the Kodak Theatre. The press stuck microphones into the celebrity faces and asked stupid questions, to which they received mostly stupid answers. People actually enjoy this stuff. The Oscar show has become the most watched television event, drawing almost a billion viewers. About one in every six members of the human race is glued to the TV on Oscar night. Glitter! Glamour! Gossip. It seems that we can never get enough.

Not that this is anything new. Think of today, Palm Sunday, as a pre-show for Holy Week. A superstar was coming to town so the people of Jerusalem spread their cloaks on the road. This was the ancient sign of honoring the new king. The crowds waved palm branches. A major event was underway, a Passover Feast that drew 2.5 million pilgrims to Jerusalem. The whole city was electrified with Oscar-night enthusiasm.

Jesus was aware of this and knew exactly what he was getting himself into. He expected a hero’s welcome that Palm Sunday, but he also knew how it was going to turn out. He had been teaching his disciples about it for weeks although they were not hearing the message. Like Hollywood, Jerusalem was a tough town.

The gospel of Luke also tells us that Jesus and his disciples did their own advance work. He sent two disciples ahead of him to acquire a colt with orders to tell who ever asked them why they were taking the colt that, “the Lord had need of it.”

The point of Palm Sunday is that the Celebrity Christ is given the celebrity treatment as he enters Jerusalem. All the expected elements are in place: He makes a royal entrance, in a procession associated with powerful rulers and conquering generals. The crowd waves palm branches, praise him for his deeds of power, and sing hymns of adulation. “Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.” He rides in on a colt that had never been ridden, just as King Solomon did before his coronation- although Jesus’ use of a colt means he is a bringer of peace. If Jesus wanted a fight he would have come in on a stallion, a warhorse, the first century equivalent of a Hummer H2.

So Jesus has the glitter of a royal entrance, the glamour of waving palm branches, even the gossip associated with the disciples and the borrowed donkey. There is a lot of buzz about this celebrity superstar as he enters the Holy City to pick up his Oscar statue. But here is the twist- his prize is a cross and he knew it.

Like modern celebrities, Jesus is not only idolized, but he is picked apart. He is feeling the love on Sunday, feeling the disappointment on Monday, and by Friday he is feeling the rage. All through the week the chatter about Jesus becomes increasingly more negative. People sense that he is not interested in driving out the oppressive Romans. They notice that his disciples are unarmed and instead of talking about glorious victories and prosperity, Jesus is talking about war and persecution.

Jesus is killed on Friday because it was God’s plan, but he was also killed on Friday because he failed to live up to human fantasy. The chief priests, scribes, and

leaders start to look for a way to kill Jesus. By the end of the week, the crowds are shouting, “Crucify him, crucify him.” The Roman governor can’t find any fault with Jesus but because of political pressure, in the end he grants them their wish to see Jesus killed.

We tend to use Jesus to meet current needs rather than letting Jesus be Jesus. The temptation for us is to impose our own agenda on the biblical text instead of being challenged by it. Let’s let Jesus be Jesus –not the superstar we want him to be. If we are ready to let Jesus step off the red carpet and be himself in our lives, be prepared for a life-changing lesson. Jesus is not interested in glitter, glamour, and gossip, but rather, he is interested in grace, giving, and goodness.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8 that we are saved by grace. We live in a state of grace. All through the events of Holy Week we find Jesus always offering God’s grace to anyone who would listen. He offered grace to the disciples who wanted to be first in the kingdom. He offered grace to Peter when Peter denied him in the courtyard. He offered grace to Judas but Judas didn’t wait to experience it. He offers his grace today for us.

As Jesus is all about grace, he is also about giving. He gave of himself fully and totally. He allowed himself to go through the Palm Sunday of praise and shouts to the Friday of cursing and shouts because he was all about giving. He who was rich became poor that we might become rich in his love. He gave until there was nothing left to give.

Jesus was about goodness. When Jesus saw that the crowds were wandering around without any direction or leadership, he was moved with compassion so deep that it nearly made him sick. That is how great was his love.

Let's give Jesus the palm branch treatment, but not make this a one Sunday wonder. His grace, his giving, and his goodness compel us not to only praise him with palm branches, but to live lives that are transformed.