

Some of you know that I was at a Minister's Council sponsored conference a couple of weeks ago. One of our activities was to do a time line of the Minister's Council and our involvement in it (both as individuals and as regions). A whole wall was devoted to our task (a large roll of paper was stretched from one end to the other and a line was taped with painter's tape the length of chart). One end represented the beginning of the Council in 1930 and the other was the future (our hopes and dreams). Most of the space was devoted to our years of involvement – 1970 to the present. Each of us took a marker and added our MC experiences to the wall. Above the line were the positive experiences; below the line were the not so positive ones. In the end we had a visual time line of the history of the MC from our perspective and the three regions involved in the conference. It was good for us who are new to the northwest to see the involvement of others and it was good for them to see our involvement in other councils around the country. As we put up events we would look at the other and say, "Were you there? I was too!" It brought us together as one as we shared our history that brought us to this point in time. (I would recommend congregations do this from time to time).

Now I chose to use this illustration as I think it is important for us to understand, "How did it come to this?" in the life and ministry of Jesus. What were the events leading up to this week in the life of Jesus? Our time line could begin with the Old Testament promises of the Messiah with the major portion being the three or so years of Jesus' ministry. Our time line might include: the announcement of Mary, the birth in Bethlehem, the visit of the Magi, the flight into Egypt, the return to Nazareth and the trip to Jerusalem when he was 12. It might also include the beginning of his ministry with his baptism by John in the river Jordan. Then we probably would spend most of our time highlighting the events of his ministry: the blind see, the lame walk, at times the dead are raised to life, evil is cast out and even the wind and waves obey his voice. We would note that he taught as one with authority and knowledge of God.

In doing this we would discover that his ministry was essentially one of love. He was not impressed with power. He enjoyed the company of others, even children and let them play in his presence. He enjoyed weddings, banquets, parties and other celebrations. He was comfortable with the rich and the poor and made little or no distinction between them. His agenda was not dictated by others, he stopped to heal the sick and to listen to the problems of those who were nearby. We would say, he was comfortable with who he was and his role in the drama before him.

We would also note that he was not afraid to confront the ills of society. He condemned the religious leaders when necessary. He got angry when God was misrepresented to the people and exposed those for whom religion was

only a name and not a life style. He challenged those who found ways around the Law and those who placed heavy burdens on the lives of others. He set at liberty those who were oppressed and his honesty may have been too much for some people. As his popularity grew in one sector it diminished in another.

How did it come this? Change is never easy. These are the days before the Passover celebration. The city, Jerusalem, is filling up with pilgrims from around the world who've come to share the Passover within its walls. This is a spontaneous crowd gathering to welcome Jesus into his city. There have been some plans – Jesus has found a colt that has never been ridden and rides it into the city. Most other pilgrims would be walking; colts were beasts to carry burdens not riders. Throngs of pilgrims are walking and Jesus rides. There is a sense of hope and expectation. Coats are used for a saddle and carpet and palm branches are torn from the trees to place in honor before him. There are shouts of praise and adoration. The noise is drawing a crowd. People want to know what is happening, who is this one coming into the city? Who is this man?

Now we all know that crowds can be dangerous. Who knows what might happen if the crowd gets out of hand. Rome has been good to Israel. It has given them a freedom that it has not given to many of the other regions it has overthrown. They have a freedom to worship and have been allowed to keep their religious laws. Rome is tolerating the Temple and its activities, etc. Any upset could change Rome's mind. Passover=crowds. There may already be tension in the city. What would happen if Jesus tries to take the city? What would happen if the people rise up? Crowds are dangerous.

The First Baptist Church of Los Angeles is located in the area where the riots of the early 1990's took place, the ones of Rodney King fame. Many of the members there remember the climate of the city in the days immediately following those riots. Crowds were quickly dispersed and there was a tenseness that things might escalate again. Some were even afraid to come in to the city and the church. There was an anxious tension. One that is still remembered by those who lived through those days and especially by those who lived in the area around the church.

We often see crowds as a threat. Certainly the religious leaders do as Jesus comes into his city. They grow anxious and wonder what might happen. We have lived through a government overthrow! We were in the Philippines when one president was taken from office and put in prison. Our phone rang early one morning and we were advised not to come into the office but spend the day at home. We were also advised not to be seen in crowds, who knew what was going to happen. Now they went to the rallies but they were concerned about how it would look if we were there and for our safety. Now, it was a peaceful overthrow (the crowds gathered quickly because of cell phones and texting!) But there was a sense of anxiety and apprehension for a few hours.

The religious leaders are in a quandary. What to do? They want to silence Jesus but are afraid of the crowds. Crowds are dangerous.

The celebration moves along. There is dancing in the streets. The noise grows. God is coming into the city. Now how many of you have been guilty of dancing in the streets? I have to admit I have. It was in downtown Manila. The Xtreme Team was spending an evening with street kids – we were meeting on a traffic island. We had sung songs, played games and were now dancing! (Afraid it is even recorded on tape). It was a time of celebration, fun – a night filled with laughter and potential. This, too, is such a time. The hopes of the people are being built up – Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

How did it come to this? Because of the depths of God’s love. The Incarnation was God coming and being a part of who we are: God coming in human form and living in our midst. God coming and touching our lives with purpose and direction. Jesus said “...*it was for this very reason I came to this hour*” (John 12:27 NIV).

However, in a few days the joy of these moments will be shattered. The Passover meal will be celebrated and then there will be the arrest in the garden, the trials before Pilate and Herod, the judgment and the death sentence. Belief systems will be challenged and the world will be forever changed.

Today as we celebrate the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem we also remember that night in the Upper Room. We remember the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. The words of that night now frame our celebration around this table. We come and in coming remember the One who came in compassion and love and who demonstrated for us the wonderful Grace of God. Jesus came to this moment and this place because of the depth of God’s love. As we come we remember that love.