

There are so few stories about Jesus that get written down and included in all four gospels in the Bible. In most cases, Matthew, Mark, and Luke might include a story, but John won't. Or Luke alone will include a story, but Matthew, Mark, and John won't. Not even the birth story of Jesus gets mentioned by all four gospels. John doesn't write about the baby born in Bethlehem. You'd think that for a story which includes heavenly angels and pregnant virgins, everyone would have wanted to put it in their book. How can you tell the story of Jesus without mentioning his beginning? I don't know, but John doesn't.

Among the couple of stories that do get told by all four gospel writers, we have the one about the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on what Christians have come to call Palm Sunday. On the first Palm Sunday Jesus rode into the city on the back of a borrowed donkey, as woman and children waved palm branches and laid their coats down on the ground for him to walk upon, all the time shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord."

In a little less than a week he will be falsely accused and killed on a cross for being a public enemy and a traitor to his own Jewish faith. He'll be stripped of his clothing and humiliated in the worst kind of way—in front of his mother. All the gospel writers will think to tell that story, too, though they'll all tell it a little differently. Matthew will paint Jesus as a something of an unfortunate victim who gets caught in a power struggle between religion and politics. Mark's Jesus is just plain tragic and sad to watch die. For Luke, Jesus dies on the cross standing up for everyone who never had anyone stand up for them before—the voiceless and powerless. John's Jesus strikes us as being passionate, if not a bit crazy; suicidal is the word I used last week. He has come into the world on a mission from God and nothing is going to keep him from his appointment with the cross. However Jesus looks to us in the end though, for now—on this Palm Sunday—everyone has him riding into the city on a donkey to shouts of Hosanna! He is the hometown hero. Which might explain why this is one of the few stories all four gospels think to include, because who doesn't like a hometown hero? And who doesn't like a good parade?

Did you ever notice what happens when someone from a small town makes it big? A couple years ago there was an article in the *Mansfield Buzz*, which is the local paper for the town I grew up in (Mansfield also has the *Sun Chronicle*, but that's considered a paper we have to share with other towns. The *Buzz* is all Mansfield), and the article was about the Broadway musical *Hamilton*. Now everyone knows *Hamilton*—the Broadway musical starring Lin-Manuel Miranda, it won 11 Tony Awards in 2016. Everyone knows *Hamilton*, but I bet not everyone knows David Korins who designed the set for the musical? I know David, because we went to high school together. David now lives in Manhattan and owns his own design company, and when *Hamilton* won it big 3 years ago, you would have thought all of Mansfield was to thank for it. After all, we gave the world David Korins. Don't we deserve a piece of the pie?

But what happens when the parade is over? The hometown hero goes back to wherever they are now from. David Korins goes back to Manhattan, and where do I go back to?

Perhaps we can admit, there is a certain disappointment at the end of the parade route, and it's not just because there's no more popcorn to buy. It's not just because the last float has gone by and all that's left to see now is that poor worker with his broom and dustbin, sweeping up the wrappers. It's because we now have to go home, back to being with just ourselves.

I remember when *Hamilton* won all those Tony Awards. The *Mansfield Buzz* was able to score an interview with David Korins. The interview took up several pages in the paper, but only a couple of the questions were about *Hamilton* and David's life now on Broadway. Most of the interview was about David growing up in Mansfield. At one point, the person conducting the interview asked him, "Growing up in Mansfield, did you ever think you'd make it all the way to Broadway?"

I read that question and thought, now what's going on here? I'm from Mansfield, and I got all the way to Cumberland, Rhode Island! Why should we be so surprised by the places we've come from and the places we've gotten to? Mansfield isn't exactly falling off the map, but even if it was... There's an old saying that goes, "You can't get there from here," but if you can't get "there" from "here," then how do you get "there?" Wherever "there" is, getting there always starts here.

I think, though, what the person who asked the question was maybe trying to do was catch a dream, to hitch their star to someone else's wagon. You see, the person who asks the question, "Did you ever think you'd get there from here," maybe they are simply the person who doesn't want to go back home after the parade is over. Maybe they are the person who doesn't believe you can get anywhere from where you are.

Did you notice where the Palm Sunday parade ends? In Mansfield, all the town parades ended at the football field, but the Palm Sunday parade ends at the temple, which in Jerusalem is just another word for the local watering hole. Everyone hung out at the temple in Jerusalem, and on this particular Palm Sunday, "everyone" would have included not just the people who still lived in town, but all the former alumni of Jerusalem high school who had come home to celebrate the national Jewish holiday of Passover. Everyone is there, including the hometown hero Jesus. He is bringing up the rear of the parade when he gets off his donkey and goes in to the temple, where three things happen.

First, he flips over the tables of everyone who selling and buying things there. In short, he goes off on them. "This is not a marketplace! Turn the temple into a storefront and you turn the grace and love of God into a commodity that can be bought and sold, and the grace and love of God can't be bought and sold. It's free!" I confess, we do it ourselves from time to time, and we must be so careful, because when we sell things in the house of God we are putting a limit on who can come in. By charging one another for what is free we rob one another of our God-given decency.

I love what the poet Mary Oliver writes in her poem titled, "Today."

Today I'm flying low and I'm  
not saying a word.  
I'm letting all the voodooos of ambition sleep.

The world goes on as it must,  
the bees in the garden rumbling a bit,  
the fish leaping, the gnats getting eaten.  
And so forth.

But I'm taking the day off.  
Quiet as a feather.  
I hardly move though I'm traveling  
a terrific distance.

Stillness. One of the doors  
into the temple.

“My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers.”  
Let this be a house of prayer, a place where we can rest in the stillness of who we are as  
God's beloved.

The second thing Jesus does in the temple is he heals the blind and the lame. Now  
the blind and the lame would never have been welcomed in the temple back then. They  
would have been considered sinners—people who must have committed some wrong that  
God would have made them blind and lame. So they would have been shut out of the  
temple. Not welcome. Go sit at the back of the bus. But Jesus kicks the door down and flips  
over the tables to give the blind and the lame plenty of room to move about in that temple.  
There is no question that in healing the blind and the lame that day, Jesus changed them.  
But more than this, he changed the world in which they lived. He pushed out its edges,  
called out its prejudice, and in so doing made room for them to live fully and freely.

This past week I saw the movie, “Free State of Jones.” It tells the true story of  
Newton Knight, a Mississippi man who during the Civil War became a dissenter of the  
confederacy and allied with runaway slaves to fight against the power and position of white  
supremacy in the south. In one telling scene, Newton is speaking with a slave named  
Moses, who fears he may be caught and sold back into slavery. “Moses, what are you?”

“I'm a free man.”

“And why is that?”

“Cause you can't own a child of God”.

“No you can't. You can own a horse. You can own a mule or a cat. But you cannot  
own a child of God”

Which brings us to the third and final thing Jesus does in the temple on Palm Sunday: he stands up for the praises of God's children. Matthew records that when the children see Jesus in the temple, they start to shout again what they were shouting along the parade route, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" The priests and pastors try to shut them up. "Shhhh. The parade is over."

And Jesus essentially tells them, "Leave the children alone. The parade is not over. For how can the parade be over when I am still here?"

How can it be over when Jesus is still here? How can praise be over when Jesus is still here? How can we try to sell the free grace and love of God when Jesus is still here? How can the lame not get up and walk and the blind see again when Jesus is still here? My friends, how can anything ever be over when Jesus is still here?