

“No Turning Back”

Palm Sunday

April 1, 2007

What is Palm Sunday...

STAN: Well, in churches all over the world, Palm Sunday commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. Crowds of people laid palm branches in his path and waved palm fronds as he passed by in honor of his greatness.

RR: Why was coming into Jerusalem so important? I thought he went to a lot of places...

STAN: Well, you're right in that many people crowded the roads to see Jesus. At the time that Jesus was traveling and preaching, the Jewish people were under occupation by the Romans. And Rome was heavily taxing them, as was their own religious leadership.

RR: But what does this have to do with Palm Sunday? And our title for today, “No Turning Back”?

STAN: Actually, everything before Jesus' ride into Jerusalem has to do with Palm Sunday. By the time Jesus made the decision to enter what was considered the holiest of cities, there was no turning back from that decision.

RR: How do you mean?

STAN: When you can't turn back from the inevitable, it means that there have been events leading up to that point that make changing the outcome impossible.

For instance, in the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was unknown. By the time he reached Jerusalem, he was famous as a healer and an unorthodox teacher.

By the time he reached Jerusalem, he was a threat to the Roman government because he attracted big crowds with the potential for an uprising. In fact, some of the people who followed him regarded him as the leader who would free them from Roman occupation.

By the time Jesus reached Jerusalem, the religious leaders feared him because he was a threat to their authority.

Jesus couldn't go back to being an unknown carpenter. He couldn't go back to being a little known teacher. He was a celebrity, a healer, a man who attracted crowds and went against conventional thought.

There was no turning back.

RR: No turning back...sort of like, after the rocket ship leaves the launching pad. Or the roller coaster car accelerates down the track and cannot go back.

STAN: Exactly. Because of what comes before, there comes a point when you cannot turn back. The rocket has fired, it has to launch. The roller coaster car has gone over the crest of the hill, it cannot stop until the ride comes to completion.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he became high profile at that point. It was now impossible to turn back from the coming events... it was the acceleration toward Good Friday, when he was put to death, and finally, Easter.

PART 1: NEW KID IN TOWN

RR: The life of Jesus was not unlike our own lives in that he came to many Points of No Return, many places where a decision or encounter with others or circumstance became a catalyst for change.

STAN: But I suppose you might say that his life was unlike ours in many ways, too. His birth to a young Jewish couple, Mary and Joseph, was pretty dramatic, what with angels and shepherds and no-room-at-the inn and wise men bearing precious gifts and a big star shining bright.

RR: You know, I've often wondered if Mary understood what a momentous ... um... well, moment that was. That was certainly a time for her when she could not turn back... well, once labor begins, there is no turning back from birth!

STAN: Interesting thought, because we often don't recognize those moments in our own lives except in retrospect.

PART 2: JESUS BECOMES “JESUS”

STAN: After Jesus' birth, the rest of his Jewish childhood is fairly unknown, as far as Biblical history goes.

RR: Until, that is, the time when he was only 12 years old. He was not even old enough for Bar Mitzvah, when he was talking with the elders in the Temple. That might be considered a moment leading up to “No Turning Back” for Jesus considering the fact that when his parents came to find him, he told them he was “doing his Father's Work”.

Was that a moment when Jesus had an idea of what might come?

STAN: Another point for Jesus came when he was baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. And “behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

RR: But Jesus struggled with the knowledge that he could make a great change in the way that the world experienced God. He withdrew to the mountains to meditate and pray. And there he was tempted by the voices of doubt and betrayal, trying to convince him to use his powers to selfish advantage. All he need do was worship power rather than God.

STAN: When did the Point of No Return happen? Jesus finally said, “Begone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship God, and God only shall you serve.” Jesus was no pushover!

PART 3: NEW RABBI IN TOWN

RR: From there, Jesus went to live near the Sea of Galilee, where he began 3 years of ministry.

STAN: During his time preaching and teaching in that area, Jesus found many friends. He called fishermen to leave the sea and follow him and help him bring his extraordinary message of God’s love to the people of Israel.

STAN: His message of redemption attracted those whose lives seemed beyond repair. His teachings attracted thousands, but his circle of closest friends numbered 12. These he called his disciples and they followed him wherever he went.

And Jesus and his 12 disciples traveled and preached and healed the sick, the lame, and the deaf.

PART 4: JERUSALEM OR BUST

STAN: After 3 years, it was time.

RR: Time to make a bigger impact.

STAN: Time to travel to Jerusalem for the Jewish holiday of Passover.

RR: The Jewish Passover was a time set aside to remember the release of the Jews from Egyptian slavery. During the time of slavery, a plague had passed over the homes of their ancestors, and afflicted instead the homes of those who had kept them in chains.

STAN: Now Jesus would tell the world that they need not be chained by evil or even death. His message would be one of hope, of eternal life. Their final journey together was just beginning.

So Jesus and his disciples walked the 65 miles to Jerusalem, teaching and healing throughout the journey.

PART 5: JERUSALEM IDOL

RR: Jesus and the disciples came to Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus decided to stay with his friends, Lazarus, Mary and Martha for the night.

STAN: A celebration meal was given for Jesus by his friends. After all, not long before, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead!

RR: And as word spread of his arrival, people congregated outside the house to catch a glimpse of these celebrities. Because of his reputation of healing the sick and raising the dead, they considered Jesus their Messiah. With power like his, he could deliver them from Roman occupation and free them from the bonds of foreign rule.

STAN: In the morning, by the time Jesus was ready to go into Jerusalem, he would have a large crowd of people accompanying him.

RR: Did Jesus realize what might happen over the next few days? As he lay down to sleep that night, did he experience any doubts about what he was about to do? Did he consider turning back?

PART 6: CELEBRITY RED CARPET

RR: The next morning as Jesus and his followers started toward Jerusalem, crowds followed along the way

STAN: When they neared the city, Jesus sent two disciples into a village to get a donkey and her colt upon which he would ride into the city. This is not what the people of Israel expected of their king. They thought he would ride in on a thoroughbred horse, a steed of war, not a humble donkey!

RR: As Jesus continued into the city, enthusiastic crowds lined the road, singing, rejoicing and blessing him. Some threw down their coats; others waved palm branches. Here was their Savior! Their Messiah!

STAN: Many asked, “Who is this person?” And the crowds shouted, “This is the prophet, Jesus from Nazareth, Galilee.”

RR: This was definitely the Point of No Return. There was no going back now. If he or his disciples had any second thoughts, they could not go back now. This was it.

PART 7: PHARISEES GET AN EARFUL FROM JESUS

RR: If Jesus suffered any doubts, he apparently overcame them, because over the next few days in Jerusalem, he kept up a very high profile.

STAN: He was constantly surrounded by crowds of people eager to hear his interpretation of the Jewish scriptures, hungry for his message of unconditional love from a God whom he called, "Father."

RR: Jesus also came under the eye of the Roman government. They did not want any more trouble than they already had from the Jewish people, and Jesus seemed to be a real rabble rouser.

STAN: Jesus criticized the religious leaders, the Pharisees, for using their position to control Temple money and command power

RR: Jesus might have feared for his life as the religious leaders became aware of his criticism

STAN: But things had already gone past the Point of No Return.

RR: Jesus very publicly tipped over the tables of the moneychangers in the temple, telling everyone that they had turned a "house of prayer into a den of thieves."

STAN: When the religious leaders tried to catch him in a mistake as he taught scripture, he called them "Fools" and "viper's brood"

RR: Jesus accused the Pharisees of being "blind guides" and "hypocrites" for they paid attention only to the letter of the law without considering the law in light of justice and mercy and faith

STAN: And he continued to preach, using parables to illustrate stories of faith and redemption

PART 8: THEIR LAST SUPPER TOGETHER

RR: On Thursday of that week, Jesus and his 12 closest friends had a dinner on what would become known as Holy Thursday. Although Jesus knew that his life with these friends would soon undergo a drastic change, his disciples were unaware that this would be their last supper together.

STAN: At that dinner, Jesus and his friends shared the traditional Passover foods, and, as was the custom, as they ate the various foods, they spoke of the significance of each dish, as a remembrance of the time their ancestors had been enslaved in Egypt.

RR: Because Jesus understood the significance of these rituals, he used this custom as a way to help his friends understand that he would soon no longer be with them.

STAN: As they each dipped their matzo in the cup of wine, Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me. And each time you break bread, remember me." Their communion of spirit and love would continue beyond the time spent in that room.

Let us now share communion together as way to remember the One who would soon lay down his life so that we might have abundant life, and life everlasting