

**All Roads Lead to Jerusalem
Matthew 21:1-11**

**March 16, 2008
Palm Sunday**

Robert Frost (1874–1963). Mountain Interval. 1920.

1. The Road Not Taken

TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth; 5

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same, 10

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back. 15

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. 20

When Grace was pregnant with Andrew we would walk at the shopping mall. Walking from our car to the mall door, there would be some kind stranger who would hold the door open for us, not knowing that with a stroller, a pregnant wife, and baby bag in tow, we were not the fastest group to come to the door. So our careful pace and the opened door encouraged other pedestrians and shoppers to fall in line behind us. The poor stranger who thought he was opening the door just for us, ended up opening the door for the line of people who queued up behind us; he was left there for almost one minute hold the door for what seemed like the whole mall.

When the door is opened, we don't know what or how many will come in.

The crowded road in Jerusalem was such a door. The folks who were gathered there that one dusty afternoon did not know

what and whom they were welcoming into their city gates. Like the rare tornado that ripped through downtown Atlanta, Georgia yesterday, the strong wind of God's power and presence in Jesus Christ was sweeping into Jerusalem. On-lookers who saw a mere carpenter's son from Galilee had no idea what was to happen.

St. Matthew does not hide the significance of the moment. He marinates this Palm Sunday story in verses from the Psalms, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. This is a divine moment and St. Matthew and the early church community know it is. This is a divine moment of heavenly proportions – fulfilled prophecy, arrows pointing to the cross, the inauguration of the King of all kings – here is the Son of David, the covenant keeper of God's promise to David that his rule and reign would last forever.

That road to Jerusalem made all the difference in the world.

Author Annie Dillard asks, "Why do we people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a package tour of the

Absolute?"¹ We should be wearing crash helmets and life preservers.

Certainly folks in Jerusalem were caught off guard by this Galilean man on a colt. Their reaction – “Who is this?” (v. 10). Jesus was such a common name that there was nothing particularly peculiar about this man, except to say that there was a segment in the crowd who was shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” while others were really clueless as to who this could be. Actually, all of them were clueless – both those who were singing and those who were quietly puzzled.

It goes to show that not even those who were with Jesus then and those of us who confess Christ as Lord now, that all of us don't have Jesus all figured out. When He acts upon our lives, He grabs a hold of us and surprises us at every turn.

I think that when we get so caught up in our lives we forget who Jesus really is to us. Somehow, I think we have boxed in Jesus to a compartment in life labeled, “ticket to heaven” or

¹ from Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters by Annie Dillard.

“answer to prayer” but all the rest of our lives doesn’t live on that dangerous, radical road which Jesus calls all disciples to live. In fact, we who live comfortably in our suburban homes with our domesticated lives bear little resemblance to the revolutionary nature of Jesus’s own life of service, sacrifice, obedience to the Father to the point of death to self, or imparting the ethics and values of the kingdom to the next generation. What is God calling you to do on that road in Jerusalem? Wave a palm frond, shout a song, and then go home? That’s what the people did. They joined the noise, waved their hands, shouted to the top of their lungs, but would not go any further. In fact, the next time they gather as a crowd is to shout for Jesus’s crucifixion when the question is put to them by Pontius Pilate whether to release him or Barabbas.

What would you do today? Jesus’s call to all of us is to live dangerous, radical lives – lives that visibly show that we have been changed and transformed. To confess and proclaim Jesus Christ is Lord is to make those hard decisions that seem like we are being crucified. Does it mean uttering a word of, “I’m so sorry” to a

spouse, child, neighbor, friend, or relative, even when it goes against your nature? Perhaps it means letting go of a treasured activity to make more time and energy for church work and community service. What is that hard, difficult decision that you need to make, that Christ needs to help you bring to the Jerusalem road and finally crucify it upon the wooden cross and let it die? An addiction? An attitude or habit?

All of our lives lead to Jerusalem in some way. We are sometimes like the crowd who are completely clueless, “Who is this Jesus? Who does he think he is, coming in here?” Or we are like the crowds, shouting from the top of our lungs, proclaiming his praises, singing Hosanna, but then go back home, stop our praises at Pilate’s gate, and learn about Jesus’s death from the newspapers or from someone else. We won’t go so far as follow Him to the cross. It’s too deadly. It costs too much of me. I won’t do it.

The question lodged upon folks then and us now is, “What did you expect?” Jesus is the divine, after all...He, together with

the Holy Spirit, have the supreme authorization of the Father to barge through the gates and slam open the doors of our hearts and our lives and say, “You are mine! I am claiming you, taking you forever, and there’s no escaping!”

When the door is opened, you don’t know what will come in. What would God put in the door of your heart when your folded hands are opened heavenward? Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, for this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. He has come for you.