

“They Got Jesus”

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A Reflection for Palm & Passion Sunday, concluding a series on John 10.

John 10:27-39

March 25, 2018

Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

Of all the days in the year, today pushes this question right in front of us: What messiah do we get?

Cuyler Black is a young man who grew up in a United Church minister’s home . . . which might explain his humour. Cuyler is a cartoonist, and he wrote a cartoon for Palm Sunday. Picture it. Jesus is riding into Jerusalem. The crowd is waving branches in the air. Amid the cheering throng, one fellow turns to another and says, “Wow! He sure spotted you fast! I guess he really is the Messiah!” The guy he’s talking to is Waldo, from the “Where’s Waldo” puzzle books.¹

Is this the messiah we get? Someone who does tricks? No. But someone who notices us.

Most basically, messiah means “king.”² More specifically, it means a king chosen by God. Even more specifically, the messiah was the king many of God’s People had been praying for. *“Lord, send us the one who will truly rule as your king. Who will free us from our enemies and vindicate Your people. Who will bring in Your reign of peace and justice, faithfulness and flourishing, life.”*

Is this the messiah we get?

II

We call this “Palm Sunday.” The palms are signs, waved in the air as Jesus process in on a donkey!³ He knows what he is doing. The Scriptures proclaimed it: *“Rejoice, God’s People! Shout loudly! Look, your king is coming to you! It’s him, Justice and Salvation. That’s him, humble and donkey-riding.”*⁴ The crowd gets the message. They see Jesus doing exactly that and celebrate. Rescue draws near. God’s deliverance is here! Today starts with celebration, acclamation, coronation.

Is this the messiah we get? The Saviour who arrives in victory?

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Where%27s_Wally%3F

² Literally, a messiah is someone who is “anointed.” Since a king’s ascension to power was marked by anointing, the terms became functionally synonymous.

³ Our worship began with a hearing of Mark 11:1-11.

⁴ My paraphrase of Zechariah 9:9.

We also call this “Passion Sunday.” The word “passion,” it literally means “suffering.” By the end of this worship service, and into this week, everything gets torn apart. What starts with the crowds acclaiming Jesus ends with the courts condemning Jesus.⁵ We will finish today with Jesus clad in a bloodied robe, wearing a mocking crown, twisted. Jesus will be denounced for blasphemy and sentenced for sedition. The mob will turn on him. The authorities will condemn him. Crucifixion will be his sentence, and everyone will get the message. Crucifixion is a sign that screams out humiliation, shamefulness, utter defeat and destruction, and God’s rejection.

Is this the messiah we get? Condemned to failure and cursed?

III

Between today’s beginning and ending, we stand here. We’ve just heard another Bible reading, the culmination of a confrontation around Jesus. Time-line-wise, this episode happened earlier, before the Passion, before the Palms. Still, as his accusers press in on Jesus, he pushes in front of us the same question: What messiah do we get?

We have been building up to this, through this season of Lent. We’ve heard Jesus say he is our Shepherd. “Shepherd” is a metaphor for messiah, for king. “I am your Shepherd,” Jesus says. Our Good Shepherd. Our Ideal Shepherd. Our Beautiful Shepherd. He knows us, he guides us, he feeds us. If we are his, then we know him, we follow him, we trust him, our Good Shepherd.

Is this the messiah we get?

But now, Jesus pushes harder. *He* says he gives life that lasts forever. What king can do that? He says his sheep will never be destroyed. What king can promise that? He says those who belong to him will never be snatched from his hand. Then he says they will never be snatched from God his Father’s hand. Which hand is it, Jesus? Yours or God’s? They are one and the same, Jesus says, because *“I and the Father are one!”*

Is this the messiah we get?

Everyone explodes. The first commandment: no gods but the Lord.⁶ The fundamental truth: *The Lord is our God. Only the Lord!*⁷

⁵ The service ended with Mark 14:17-15:15.

⁶ The first Commandment; see Exodus 20:1-3.

⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4, the *Shema Yisrael*, the centrepiece of Jewish spirituality, expressing its fundamental monotheism.

It is blasphemy, what Jesus says.

Unless that's who he truly is, the Messiah we get.

IV

What messiah do we get?

Here's some good news.

We don't have to decide. We don't get to decide.

It is good news because I have lots of ideas about what I want to get. But I do not trust myself to know what I need to get. Let me say that again: I do not trust myself to know what I need. Thank God, I do not have to. Neither do you.

Did the people in the crowd shouting "Hosanna!" know what messiah they needed to get? It didn't matter. They got Jesus.

Did the people in the mob screaming "Crucify him!" know what messiah they needed to get? It didn't matter. They got Jesus.

Did the religious experts crying "Blasphemy!" know what messiah they needed to get? It didn't matter. They got Jesus.

Did the governor passing sentence — Crucifixion! — know what messiah he needed to get? It didn't matter. He got Jesus.

The Messiah

- who notices you in the crowd;
- who establishes justice and peace, faithfulness and flourishing;
- who arrives in victory, keeping God's promise;
- whose victory is a cross, enduring our shame;
- who knows, guides and feeds us;
- who holds us and never lets us go;
- who is one with the Father;
- who is God with us.

We don't get to decide. We don't have to decide.

He gives us himself. He's the Messiah we get.

This is the good news of Jesus.