

Matthew 26:14--27:66

The week started out with an exuberant crowd shouting “Hosanna!” They were looking for the Son of David to come restore the kingdom as it had been in the time of King David when the Jewish people were in power. The time before the Babylonian exile. The time before the Maccabees were fighting in the hill country. The time before the Roman rule. Jesus was thought to be the revolutionary Messiah who would bring an end to the Roman oppression.

Yet he rode a donkey, a symbol of peace, into Jerusalem while the crowds cried out. Meanwhile, on the other side of town Pilate most likely entered Jerusalem at the same time on a white stallion, a symbol of war. Pilate, a symbol of Caesar, a symbol of Roman rule. He too had crowds gathered, cheering him on. It was as if the city was the center of a conflict between peace and war.

Jesus went into the temple and found the moneychangers overcharging to convert people’s common coins into temple coins. He found the sale of sacrificial animals taking place in the temple courtyard. Jesus was angry that his Father’s house was being used so crudely. He made a statement of his displeasure as he overturned the moneychanger’s tables and chased the people out. This caused the already growing fear, distrust, and dislike the religious authorities had for Jesus to escalate, and when they met with Judas it was a perfect match. Judas wanted Jesus to act against Rome and perhaps thought he could be forced into action. The religious leaders wanted Jesus to disappear.

They had Jesus arrested because they believed he claimed himself to be God, which was an act of treason in the Roman society. An offense punishable by death. Pilate saw no crime and washed his hands of the situation, releasing Barabbas as the crowds cried out to crucify Jesus. And so Jesus was crucified. On a Roman cross. Creation cried out in protest as an earthquake rocked the city. The men who taunted him were convinced he truly was God’s son. His secret disciples Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus laid his body in a tomb and sealed it. Guards were put in place to ensure the body would not be stolen by his followers. And the Sabbath was celebrated by those of the Jewish faith.

I believe there have been times when we all feel as though we have hit a brick wall. Either we worked hard toward something we thought was worthwhile, only to have it fail and we fall flat on our faces, or when we’ve worked hard to establish a relationship and it is suddenly ended. We didn’t get the raise we thought we deserved. Our child has rebelled and turned away from us. Our best friend has betrayed us. Things just didn’t work out the way we thought they would. We feel alone, deserted, filled with pain. Why does God let these things happen?

Because they are a part of life. Jesus experienced all the difficulties we encounter as a human. He knows what it’s like to live this life. God is right there with us as we go through these difficult life experiences and knows our pain. The pain of loss. The pain of rejection. The pain of betrayal. The pain of injury. God doesn’t leave us when we experience these difficulties. God won’t leave us. God stands right by our side and gives us the strength we need to go through whatever it is we are experiencing. The tomb was sealed. But Easter is coming. All glory be to God.