

“Hindsight Is Always 20/20”

Ever wonder if you *made* or are *making* the right decision? When faced with a dilemma, a multiple-choice life situation, do you second-guess yourself to the point that you become paralyzed? Does the fear of making a *wrong* decision override the confidence of making a *right* one? Hindsight is always 20/20. It is easy to look back on a decision and see which was the better choice. Monday morning quarterbacks are a dime a dozen. But there are circumstances in life when we have no guarantees of the outcome. We all will face incidents when we could choose a, b, or c and feel good about the decision. I think we are called to live like today is the last day of our life.

Sometimes circumstances prompt us to realize the importance of today. To realize the value of one year: Ask a student who has failed a final exam. To realize the value of one month: Ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby. To realize the value of one week: Ask an editor of a weekly newspaper. To realize the value of one hour: Ask the lovers who are waiting to meet. To realize the value of one minute: Ask a person who has missed the train, bus, or plane. To realize the value of one second: Ask a person who has survived an accident. To realize the value of one millisecond: Ask the person who has won a silver medal in the Olympics. Time waits for no one. Treasure every moment you have, and remember that hindsight is always 20/20.

This is how the disciples lived; they lived for the day, basked in the presence of Jesus, rode the euphoric high of following a great leader. They viewed life through their lenses. They interpreted events through their filters. Is that necessarily bad? Let's look at our Gospel Lesson for the day. Being Palm Sunday, it is appropriate that we focus on Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It is a story found in all four gospel accounts. It was Passover time, the greatest celebration for the Jews. They were commemorating the liberation from Egyptian bondage. Passover celebrated the fact that the angel passed over the doors of identified Israelites, and the next day, they were given their freedom from slavery. Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles were the three compulsory festivals of the Jews. To the Passover in Jerusalem, Jews came from the ends of the earth. Wherever a Jew might live, it was his ambition to observe one such Passover. To this day, when Jews in a foreign land observe the Passover, they may say, “This year here; next year in Jerusalem.” (William Barclay. The Gospel of John, vol. 2. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1975. p. 115)

A great crowd had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover and a great crowd was traveling with Jesus also. Those with Jesus had seen him raise Lazarus from the dead just a few days earlier. Both crowds were interpreting the events of the day through their own filters. These Jews lived in a Roman Empire; they were governed by the Romans. They were tired of paying unfair taxes. They were weary of the oppression. And now this great healer, this charismatic holy man was headed to Jerusalem. In the minds of the Jews, a showdown was brewing. This Jesus was headed to the capitol city, to Jerusalem, Roman headquarters for their region. They viewed Jesus as their liberator, a revolutionary leader who would lead them to prominence on the world scene once again. He was being viewed as a literal savior, one who would save them from Roman domination.

Their nationalism was exhibited in what they did and what they said. In the second century BC, the Maccabees had used palm branches when celebrating the deliverance of the Temple and city from Syrian conquerors (I Maccabees 13:51; II Maccabees 10:7)

Since the palm branch had come to be used on coins and in Temple feasts as a perpetual

reminder of these Maccabean exploits, to wave such fronds in the face of Jesus was a symbolic way of encouraging him to do the same against the Romans. A further indication of their mood was reflected in the cry “Hosanna!”—a chant which meant “save (deliver) us now”—and in their blessing of Jesus as he who comes in the name of the Lord (from Psalm 118:26). In the original context, this phrase referred to the Temple devotee on his way to *worship*, but here it was reinterpreted by the crowd to mean the King of Israel on his way to *conquest*. (Broadman Bible Commentary, vol. 9. William E. Hull. Nashville: Broadman Press. 1970 p. 320)

The crowds were expectant. They had aspirations of a new day on the horizon. The Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem left the city when they heard Jesus was coming. They ran to greet him. It was a scene of high energy. They couldn’t wait to see him; knowing of his impending arrival, they simply could have stayed within the walls of the city and waited. But the desire for a better day was greater than the complacency of waiting. Because of their excitement of the imminent arrival of Jesus, they ran to meet him.

While all of you know that I went to the University of Georgia; some of you are unaware that my sister, who is fifteen months younger than I, also graduated from that fine institution. I remember vividly a particular weekend visit. Either it was the first time she had come home for a weekend during her freshman and my sophomore years, or the first time in a long time. My sister drove a 65-Mustang Coupe with a 289 cubic-inch engine, four-barrel carburetor, and dual exhaust. We simply could *not* sneak up on my parents. But on the other hand, they were expecting us at a certain time, and we were anxious to see them too. When we drove up, I can vividly remember the screen door flying open, and my dad and mom running out to the car to see us. They greeted us before we even got out of the car with our dirty laundry. They were so happy to see their kids that they had run out with smiles to greet us. They could have waited on us to come in the house. But for them, they wanted to see us as quickly as possible.

The same was true with the Jews. They had been anticipating the arrival of the Messiah for a long time. In their minds, Jesus was the Promised One, the One who was going to bring about changes that were long-overdue. Hopes were heaped upon him. He was the one that was going to change their lives forever.

Although Jesus was the Messiah, the Promised One, he came with a different agenda than the one anticipated by the throng. The fact that Jesus rode a young donkey is significant. Had he been a *warrior*, he would have ridden a white *stallion*. The fact that he rode a young *donkey* signified that he came in peace. He was not a *political* Messiah; his kingdom was not of this world.

Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the story almost identically. John offers a different perspective. He says that at first the disciples did not understand this. The minds of everyone present that day must have been filled with a mob-type hysteria. They saw him on a donkey, not a stallion, yet they *still* waved the palm branches. Although Jesus was communicating a message to them of his identity, they still cried “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Although he chose a mode of transport to signify his identity, the disciples and other crowd members preferred to view the world through their own set of lenses. Jesus drew a dramatic picture of what he claimed to be, but no one understood that claim, not even the disciples.

Sometimes we *blast* the thick-headed disciples for their responses. “How could they do that?” we wonder. We are appalled at their indiscretions, their ineptitude, their lack of judgment. And as we judge the disciples, we continually hold to the adages “Live for the day. Carpe Diem-seize the day. Take one day at a time.” Evidently, we espouse this wisdom for *ourselves*, but not for them.

Like the disciples, we interpret life through *our* filters. We translate life's events based upon our own life experiences, our hopes and dreams. Even our personal understanding of God has come through filters. If a person had an *abusive* father, it may be difficult to view God as a *loving* father.

I'm not so sure that I would have behaved differently from the disciples outside the Jerusalem walls on what we call Palm Sunday. Jesus was certainly meeting and exceeding all their expectations of whom the Messiah was; the problem lay in *their* understanding of what the Messiah was to do and be.

As a human, I see God and understand Jesus through a certain set of lenses, spectacles that may be constructed differently from yours. I am an advocate of living today as if it were your last one. Every day, every minute, every breath truly *is* a gift from God. But I am also an advocate of living today by *faith*. Like the disciples we may not understand God correctly all the time. We may interpret circumstances in error because of the flawedness of our filters. Yet hindsight is always 20/20. In retrospect, like the disciples, we may find that we made a wrong decision. Looking back, we may see where God was with us when we doubted the divine presence. In reflection, we may see where we were totally mistaken on a stance we took. The message is not to live tentatively, always wondering if you are doing the right thing or putting off the important decisions until we can be absolutely certain of their outcome. Even though the disciples did not fully understand Jesus' role as the Messiah, they were never rejected by Jesus. We are not going to get it right *all* the time. Hindsight is *always* 20/20; we will see the errors of our ways, but grace is available for us each time we misunderstand God's direction, each time we mess up, although we have good intentions.

The message is that we must live life *today*, even with mistakes, but with the faith in knowing that Easter's coming. The message is that we should live life *today* recognizing that hope is available even when we fail. The message is that we should live life *today*, knowing that grace will abound. Even though the disciples misread who Jesus really was, they were given hope and grace, and encouraged to live by faith. Today, the message is the same for us: to live by faith everyday knowing that God's grace is available, and that there is hope because of the resurrection.