

PALM SUNDAY

IT WAS PALM SUNDAY AND, BECAUSE OF A SORE THROAT, FIVE-YEAR-OLD JOHNNY STAYED HOME FROM CHURCH WITH A SITTER. WHEN THE FAMILY RETURNED HOME, THEY WERE CARRYING SEVERAL PALM BRANCHES. THE BOY ASKED WHAT THEY WERE FOR. "PEOPLE HELD THEM OVER JESUS' HEAD AS HE WALKED BY."

"WOULDN'T YOU KNOW IT," THE BOY FUMED, "THE ONE SUNDAY I DON'T GO, HE SHOWS UP!"

Remember how those old tv shows with two parts, use to start, and now some highlights from last weeks adventures. Jesus rode into Jerusalem there was something like a parade with people laying down palms at his feet and Shouting Hosanna in the highest blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

- Then the tide quickly turned. One of Jesus' disciples betrayed him.
- He was arrested in the garden. The disciples with him disserted him.
- Jesus was put on trial. One of his disciples denied him three times.
- Jesus had been un justly judged and accused. He had been brutally crucified, Abandoned denied and betrayed.

When we last met, Jesus had been crucified, But three days later God raised him from the dead.

He is risen. He is risen indeed.

Mary had told them that she had seen the Lord but they didn't believe her. Now we find the twelve actually only 10 Judas was gone and Thomas was missing probably had to take his kids to a baseball game.

Now a week later, we find Jesus' disciples, well they used to be Jesus' disciples, they used to followed Jesus before they Abandoned denied and betrayed him. They were locked in a room, fearing for their lives. They were locked in a room scared to death that they would be the next ones crucified.

Jesus came and stood among them. Wait, the door was locked. Jesus stood among them. How did that happen?

The man who they used to follow, the man who was their teacher, their rabbi, their lord, the one they had Abandoned denied and betrayed stood among them. They were hiding in a locked room fearing for their lives, fearing the Jews or Judians, fearing they would be dragged away. And now it seems to go from bad to worse. Now Jesus whom they had abandoned denied and betrayed stood in front of them.

They had broken their relationship with him. And here he was appearing to them in a locked room.

Jesus says to them, Shalom, which means peace be with you. Shalom, not what have you done? Not how could you do that? Not I hate you go away. Jesus says Shalom.

Shalom in Hebrew can be used in a number of ways. It can be used quite casually, Hey how you doing? Or peace, or completeness or inner peace. But here Jesus is not saying how you doing, here is inner peace. This is different. Jesus says peace to you meaning, we're friends

again. Peace be with you. You've abandoned me, denied me, betrayed me and I forgive you, let's be friends again.

Like my friend's ice cream story where every time he looked at that kid or tried to look at the kid the picture of the ice cream cone he stole from him got in the way. Now the picture is gone. Now when he looks at him he don't see the lost ice cream now he sees the person.

Jesus doesn't see betrayers, deniers or abandoners. Jesus sees his friends. Who do you see when you look in the mirror. Do you see all of the mistakes you have made? Do they block the view so that you can't see what you really look like or who you really are?

You know what Jesus sees when he looks at you? Do you know who Jesus sees when he looks at you? He sees you. He sees the you he created, the you he loves.

But you have made mistakes, you have sinned. You have abandoned denied and betrayed Jesus. Maybe not the same way as the disciples maybe not as dramatically. But you feel like you have blocked God's view of you. We think I have done bad things, that's what Jesus sees when he looks at me. That's why we might be scared of God. Maybe we hide in a locked room or try to hide from God in some other way.

Yes of course, we've all done things we are ashamed of, but remember what Jesus did with the Disciples, the ones who Abandoned denied and betrayed him. He gave them peace, he restored the relationship. It was a divine concoction of forgiveness, reconciliation, love and hope all in one.

But now Jesus starts playing dirty. And if you're like me you're not going to like it. It's good for you. It's essential for the world but it's one of the toughest things in the world.

Remember how your parents used to drive you around in the car and then one day they handed you the keys? Today we see Jesus handing off the keys to the kingdom.

First he showed us how he did it in the kingdom. He forgave those who sinned against him. Now it our turn. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any they are retained.

In other words, Someone sins against you, if you forgive them they are forgiven, if you don't forgive them, their sins are retained. Which means you keep them and carry them.

I've tried to look at this office of the keys as if I were a Judge and they bring in this person and I am to decide whether they are going to be forgiven or not. I forgive them, they are forgiven. I don't forgive them their sins are retained. They take the person away and it has no effect on me. But that's not how it works. If I don't forgive them I carry those sins around with me.

It reminds me of email. Forgiving is like deleting. You delete it, it is gone. If you don't delete it, it stays in your inbox. It will stay there until you delete it.

Now with email I know some people who never delete any thing. They still have every email they have ever received. And it is no big deal unless you run out of space and you can't get anymore mail or you computer freezes up.

If someone hurts you and it bothers you, causes you pain every time you think about it. If you retain those sins they will stay with you and you will carry the burdens of them.

It is rather ironic. When we say, Oh I will never forgive them for what they did to me that means we are retaining that and carrying it with them for the rest of our life. We will really get back at them by suffering ourselves.

Radio talk host Don Imus said some really terrible things to the Rutgers Women's Basketball team, you probably heard about it. They were terrible racist, sexist ignorant things to say. He got fired for saying those things.

Imus requested to meet with the basket ball team and those young women graciously met with him. I am not trying to tell those women what to do, they have to do what they have to do. But if they don't forgive him not he deserves being forgiven. He doesn't but if they don't forgive him, if they retain those sins. Those sins will follow them until they forgive him.

This has come as a life changing lesson for me. Hopefully. Like many of you I have forgiven many people who have sinner against me and hurt me. Their are others I haven't gotten around to forgiving yet. I've thought that I'd just tried to forget them but they seem to follow me. I carry them around with me.

My prayer for you is that just as Jesus brought shalom to his disciples. They didn't deserve forgiveness. They ran away when he needed them. They denied knowing him. One even betrayed him. They didn't deserve forgiveness. But he gave them peace. He reconciled with them. I pray that Jesus would not see what we have done and that he would bring Shalom, peace to you, to us. Then we can bring shalom, so that we can bring it to others and reconcile our relationships. Shalom, Peace be with you all. Amen.