

Of all the words you could use to describe Jesus, I'll bet *threatening* is not one that would come to the top of your mind:

But if we were alive during Jesus' ministry, we'd know better
Because lots of people were feeling threatened by Jesus

One time, a crowd of people were so awestruck at Jesus' teaching
That they attempted to grab him and make him a king by force
Israel at the time was occupied by the Roman Empire
Who took threats of revolution with the utmost seriousness
Rome had a zero-sum view of power; only one King could rule
And Jesus knew that this wasn't the way he would establish his Kingdom
He wasn't going to be the leader of a violent uprising
So he walked through the crowd away from them
Away from what surely would have been his premature death
And the massacre of everyone present
Jesus was seriously threatening to Rome, more than they even knew.

Jesus was also a threat to many in the religious hierarchy of his day
He spared no words for the priests & teachers of the law
Calling them snakes and white-washed tombs
He was repulsed that some had become bed-fellows of the Romans
Clinging to whatever scrap of worldly power they could get their hands on
The religious elite hated Jesus because he scathingly critiqued
Their self-gratifying, exploitive behaviors
And stirred up the masses with his personal authority & magnetism
And in doing so, put a gigantic target on his back
Jesus was threatening to *status quo* of the religious, more than they knew

Jesus understood that his mission on earth would reach its climax in Jerusalem
With a head-on confrontation of the powers of both Israel & Rome
When he would complete the task his Father had given him
So he conducted the majority of his ministry in northern Israel in Galilee
In fact, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus goes to Jerusalem only twice before
The week he was killed—his dedication as a child & when tempted by devil

In Luke 9, the text says Jesus “set his face for Jerusalem”

He knew the time had come; he knew what he would be walking into
That his entire life and ministry had been leading to this moment

So he began making his way from Galilee south toward Jerusalem

He descended into the river valley parallel to the Jordan
A dry and arid wilderness where thousands of years prior
His ancestors had first traveled after their deliverance from Egypt
And years of wandering before destroying the enemy city of Jericho

As Jesus marched, his intensity and his tone heightened

On his way a man says to Jesus “I’ll follow you wherever you go”
But first let me take care of some family business
And Jesus replies “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back
Is fit for the kingdom of God.”
Which seems harsh unless you know what is about to happen
He’s deliberately walking into the lion’s den, into danger and into death
There’s no turning back for Jesus at this point

Along the way he reminds the disciples what was about to happen

Though they didn’t understand
He warns the masses the cost of following him involves carrying a cross
He’s even approached by some sympathetic Pharisees
Warning him NOT to enter Jerusalem b/c there’s a bounty on his head
Jesus responds: “I’m making my way to Jerusalem to finish my work
And when I get there the people will shout:
“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.”
He was coming as King—in confrontation of Rome
And he was coming in God’s name—in confrontation of the religious

Jesus enters Jericho (one of the lowest places on earth) & encounters Zacchaeus

Celebrates one of his last meals before his passion in the home of a sinner
Who had experienced the mercy of God
And then turns west toward Jerusalem
Even by car the 15 mile trip from Jericho to Jerusalem is tiring—
Long, winding roads that weave around and over endless rows of desert hills

Slowly ascending to the heights of the great city

And as Jesus approaches the outskirts of the city

He passes through the towns of Bethany and Bethphage

Where he had visited his friends Mary & Martha so many times

Before climbing up the east side of the Mount of Olives

He sent ahead two of his disciples to fetch a donkey for him to ride into town

A humble creature, symbolizing the peaceful manner in which

Israel's true king would make his procession

And then, when he finally crested the peak of the Mount of Olives

The great city of Jerusalem came into full view

Glowing in the light of the sun, with the glorious Temple—

The sign of God's presence among his people standing proudly

Along its eastern wall with its gates wide open

And as he started down the steep road from the Mount of Olives toward the city

People came out in masses and began to shout aloud what he'd predicted:

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

These were treasonous words against Caesar

But they shouted all the louder:

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace on earth and in heaven!"

"Hosanna!" "God has come to save us!"

And they waved palm branches, signs of peace

And they spread their cloaks and garments on the ground

In honor and worship of Israel's true king and Lord

The Pharisees, terrified of what the Romans would do if they heard the crowds

Ran to Jesus, telling him to quiet the crowds

But he replied "If they stay quiet, the stones themselves will cry out"

Though he has tried to keep his identity quiet for much of his ministry

In this moment, he does nothing to discourage or soften their praise

He quietly affirms the truth of their words

Jesus was pressed in on all sides by the crowds
And there was a cacophony of voices and songs and shouts
Overwhelming his senses

And then, when he reached the bottom of the Mount of Olives
And the city stood before him
He was suddenly gripped with emotions
But not the ones you'd expect
In the presence of the disciples and the crowds chanting his praise [SLOW]
He began to weep

As he looked at the city
He wept and he wept and he wept
Between tears he said, "Jerusalem, If you only knew what made for peace."

He was overwhelmed with grief at what would happen to the city
Within the lifetime of those gathered around him

Though he came as the Prince of Peace
And through the cross would bring peace between God and humanity
Many would still not believe
Would insist on "making peace" on their own terms, rejecting God's plan
And through their rebellion against Rome would inflict upon themselves
A long and painful, but final act of merciless destruction
When the city—and most importantly—its temple would be destroyed
Never to be rebuilt (and many in the city would be killed)

He wept because those who rejected peace on his terms
Would only know further pain and grief
And the undoing of all they'd loved in this life

While the crowds are cheering, Jesus is weeping

It reminds me of that old Johnny Cash song, "The Man in Black"

*Well, you wonder why I always dress in black,
Why you never see bright colors on my back,
And why does my appearance seem to have a somber tone.
Well, there's a reason for the things that I have on.*

*I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down,
Livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town,*

*I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime,
But is there because he's a victim of the times.*

*Well, we're doin' mighty fine, I do suppose,
In our streak of lightnin' cars and fancy clothes,
But just so we're reminded of the ones who are held back,
Up front there ought 'a be a Man In Black.*

In the middle of this great worship celebration, Jesus is the Man in Black
The prophet Isaiah said that the Messiah was to be a Man of Sorrows
And here is.

This is a poignant glimpse into the heart of God
They say that our response to success reveals our true motivation
What does this moment reveal about what motivates Jesus?

That he is truly and utterly and deeply motivated by compassion
That when Scripture says “God is love”
Jesus proves it in the agony of watching his beloved choose pain over peace

On Palm Sunday, **Jesus welcomed the worship of the faithful, but wept for the welfare of the city.**

What a good and right thing for us to be here today to worship Jesus

In fact—it is the MOST right thing—it’s what we were created to do

- But do we, like Jesus, also weep for the welfare of our city?
- Are we moved by compassion when our friends/coworkers/family
Seek peace in ways that will never achieve it?
- Are we grieved by injustice, saddened by violence and poverty and
distressed by the indignity that persons made in the image of God live
with on a daily basis?

It is good for us to worship—Jesus welcomes it with joy—but it’s also good for us
to weep and to join our God in his grief.

When people talk about God— what God is really like—what God values
Which, in an election year, people are doing frequently

Throwing around God’s name & Word to support any # of political positions

When we talk about God—we have to talk about Jesus
And if we talk about Jesus—we have to remember this moment
We have to remember his tears.

NT Wright: “Jesus’ tears are at the core of the Christian Gospel.”
This moment shows us that the attitude of God revealed in Jesus
Toward humanity is one of brokenness and empathy and respect

Brokenness because he knew it wasn’t meant to be this way
Empathy because he experienced first-hand the conflict in the human heart
Respect b/c he would not force himself on those who would not have him

This is one of my favorite moments in all of Scripture
In fact, nothing convinces me that he loves me more than his tears

We worship a God who weeps.
Who joins with us in our suffering
Who grieves at our side
Who, like a parent, longs for his children to choose the way of peace
And to avoid self-destructive behaviors

We have had numerous families within our church lose loved ones in the last 2
weeks— how comforting to know that God grieves at their side

Many of our students on SBM over the last week have seen God’s grace at work in
the world; they’ve also seen sin/injustice in ways that have broken their hearts.

We have good news to offer the world
We are not alone in our suffering—that Jesus, the Man of Sorrows
Joins us in our grief & extends to us hope
For this age and the age to come

This point—about the God who weeps—is critical for us to take in
Because it’s not how many outside (or even inside) the church
Tend to think about God

People make up quotes for God on billboards
And cite God to justify violence or hateful behavior
Or make God into a tyrant, judging our every move

If want to really know God, we need only to look into the face of Christ
John 1: “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is God
and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”

On Palm Sunday, we see God in Christ weeping.
And it’s his compassion that leads to the events of Holy Week.
Washing the disciples’ feet on Maundy Thursday
Submitting to arrest, trial and crucifixion on Good Friday
Descending to the realm of the dead on Holy Saturday
Before triumphantly conquering death on Easter Sunday

50 some-odd days after his Palm Sunday entrance to Jerusalem
On the other side of his death and his resurrection
After appearing to the disciples *very much alive*
Jesus handed on a new mission to the disciples who loved him

Matthew 28:16-20

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

These Scriptures invite us to respond in 3 ways this morning:

First, we are invited to worship him (like crowds shouting praise in streets)
We are invited to declare our unrivaled allegiance to our king & his kingdom
To surrender ourselves to his rule and to learn from him how to live like him

Second, we are invited to weep with him

As he looked over the city and was moved with compassion to point of tears
So we are invited to see people and see our world in its truly broken state

Apart from the redeeming work of God
We are invited to be broken

And last, we are invited to work with him

It is a good thing to worship, a good thing to weep & feel compassion
But it must not end there

We are *empowered* to announce to the world—in our words and actions
That Jesus is the world's true king
And that sin and evil and injustice have no place in his kingdom
And so we will work until he returns to finish the job

We are invited to worship him, to weep with him and to work with him.

A church that embraces this mission of worshipping, weeping and working
Is a church that is threatening to the status quo
Of spiritual blindness & apathy & self-centeredness
But also of poverty and injustice and violence and disorder
However and wherever they are found

Don't we long to be a community of people:

Who gather to worship the Risen Christ w/passion and conviction
Who are moved with empathy and love
And who, empowered by God's Spirit, band together
To confront the darkness of our city and our world

A handful of years ago, the Barna Group conducted a study of our church/Tulsa
Lynn from Barna delivered to us the results
On the whole, the city liked us, our people were happy w/state of things
Even though the results she delivered were mostly positive
Lynn looked discontent
For a minute, she struggled until she could find just the right words

She said: "These results are fine. Yes, people seem to like the church well enough
and the congregation is happy enough w/how things are going. But are we
content with that?"

And then she said these words I'll never forget:

"Should we not be a force for God in this community?"

If you're discontent with keeping things safe and trying to keep people happy
And long to be part of something bigger, something that matters
If you yearn for the people of God to be a force for God in our community

Then, with renewed clarity and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, let's:

Worship him

Weep with him

And roll up our sleeves and get to work with him.

[Pray]