

THE WAY IT LOOKS AND THE WAY IT IS

Twenty-four years ago I took a “nostalgia trip” back to Ames, Iowa, where I had gone to college.

I hadn't been back to Ames for over thirty years and I was anxious to reconnect with some people I had known there and to see what had happened to the campus and the town.

Well, the trip was a disappointment.

Most of the people I had wanted to see were gone and the campus and the town had changed so much they were almost unrecognizable.

I might just as well have been in another city.

I remember thinking: “Nostalgia just ain't what it used to be!”

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We were excited about seeing some of the famous places mentioned in the Bible—the mountain where

Jesus had preached His famous [famous](#) sermon, the garden of Gethsemane where he had sweat blood, Calvary where he had been crucified.

But we couldn't find any of those places.

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Our tour guide told us that nobody knew exactly where those things had taken place.

If thirty years had changed Ames, Iowa a lot, you can imagine how much 2000 years has changed Israel.

To begin with, the ground level was about twelve feet higher than it had been in Jesus' day, due to the accumulation of dirt and sand..

And since Jerusalem had been attacked and ransacked twice by its enemies since Jesus had walked its streets, most [mosy](#) of the buildings we saw hadn't even been built when he had been there.

We saw some crumbling stone steps which were supposedly the steps to the high priest's house where the temple soldiers had taken Jesus to be interrogated by Caiphas but they weren't certain even about that.

Jerusalem was a different city than it had been in Jesus' day.

I'm not sure why I have a longing to see places and things that I associate with the past, but I do know that I'm incurably nostalgic; I want the rocks to cry out to me and say, ***"We were here! We saw! We know! We can testify to it!"***

I guess I'm not alone because this same desire to see things from the past fueled a major source of revenue to the church back in Luther's time.

People would pay dearly for "relics"—pieces of wood that were supposedly part of the cross, a piece of cloth that was said to have touched Peter's body.

They believed that such things had special healing powers--simply because of what they were and where they had been.

This fascination with relics still goes on today: awhile back a relic was put on display at a west side Catholic church where Pope John Paul had officiated at a mass several years before.

I suppose the desire to see a bed George Washington slept in or a costume Elvis Presley wore at a famous concert comes from the same place in our psyche that the desire to see relics does.

Things from the past have a kind of magic for us.

About four centuries after Christ a bishop of the Eastern Church by the name of Cyril of Jerusalem lived and taught in the city where Our Lord had been crucified.

Walking with his students amidst the ruins of Jerusalem, he gave them instructions about how to become pastors of the church.

In his diary he remarked that his students repeatedly asked him to show them the tomb where the body of their crucified Lord had been laid.

But Cyril couldn't point his students to the stone tomb where Jesus' body had been laid because nobody knew where it was.

Instead, he pointed them to a more reliable witness.

He pointed them to the Words of the One who had said: ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”***

Jerusalem was no longer the same city it had been at Jesus' sacked and burned twice since the time but Jesus' words were now turning the world upside down.

Now, two thousand years later, when the stones of ancient Jerusalem are silent and tourist shops decorate the *via dolorosa*, Jesus' words still resonate around the world.

Ames, Iowa has changed and ancient Jerusalem has changed but Jesus' words have neither changed nor passed away. Ames, Iowa has changed and Jerusalem has changed but Jesus' words have neither changed nor passed away.

Their truth and power is undiminished.

Now admittedly, it's a little hard for us to understand how words can be more permanent than stones.

Our words come and go and no one listens to us anyway, but the stones stay around—or so it seems to us.

But we would do well to remember the Proverb that says: **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”**

What makes sense to us at any given point in time, doesn't necessarily MAKE sense.

We have to remember that we are fallen creatures who live in a fallen world and we don't see things clearly.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “**We see now as in a glass darkly,**”—like someone looking through a dirty window.

The problem is that we think we ARE seeing things clearly and understanding them correctly and nobody no one is going to change our mind about minds on that.

That’s why there are things called “arguments”!

The last thing we want to think is that we have been betrayed by our own powers of observation and reason.

We like to think of ourselves as realists.

After all, only fools and psychotics are out of touch with reality, and we’re neither fools nor psychotics.

Yet the Scriptures do tell us that we see things through a glass darkly.

Even the great philosophers of history agree with this.

Plato, the father of philosophy, made this the basis of his entire system of thought.

In his foundational work, *The Republic*, he said that we are like people who sit in a cave with their backs to the entrance, gazing at a wall upon which are cast

the shadows of things that pass back and forth in front of the cave.

Since the shadows are all that we see, we think that they are reality—instead of just shadows of reality.

In the same way, Plato said, what we call real is only a poor reflection—a shadow—of what is actually real.

The reason that we are so limited in our ability to discern reality is that our powers of perception and cognition are severely compromised by the sin that we inherited at our birth.

Our minds are like computers that have been overloaded with useless software that has slowed them down to a crawl.

We're not aware of this any more than a slow computer is aware of the fact that it is slow.

But it IS slow and so are we.

So we can't lean on our own understanding.

In order to see things clearly, we need to view the world through God's eyes rather than through our own.

And the way God has provided for us to do this is by giving us a new set of eyes—the eyes of faith—and a description of reality, which is the Bible.

Only when we view the world through eyes of faith in Jesus and in His word do we come to know the truth. Only when we view the world through eyes of faith in Jesus and in His word can we come to know the truth.

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Christ is the revealer of reality.

He is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

When we walk with Him we walk in the light, but if we walk apart from Him we walk in darkness.

And if we walk in darkness, we will see only what our physical eyes allow us to see and that will not be the truth and it won't lead us to freedom.

On the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem, the day we now call Palm Sunday, the mood could not have been more joyful.

Adoring crowds, singing children, shouts of Hosanna—it was clear to everyone that the king was coming to his people, just as the prophet Zechariah had said he would: **“Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”**

Something like a coronation was taking place—or at least that was how it seemed to everyone..

But Jesus saw a different picture that day.

He saw what lay behind the joyous Hosannas.

What did he see?

The answer is supplied in a revealing statement John makes about Jesus in the second chapter of his Gospel: **“Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them...[because] he knew what was in a man.”**

And what was in a man?

Jesus Himself spells it out in *Mark 7:21*: “...**from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.**”

In these words, Jesus fleshes out what God said about man at the time of the Great Flood, namely that “...**every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.**”

Jesus didn’t underestimate—as we consistently do—the evil that resides in every human being.

We’re quite good at concealing this evil—not only from each other but from ourselves as well.

We’ve developed effective techniques that keep us from having to face the ugly truth about ourselves. Things like comparing ourselves favorably to people who are worse than we are so that we don’t feel so bad about ourselves.

You know the drill: “*At least I haven’t done THAT!*”

Or rationalizing our sins as ways of serving a greater good: “*I hated to have to do it, but I’m afraid it was necessary.*”

Or minimizing the rotten things we’ve done in the past by gilding our memories with nostalgia.

Oh we're good at hiding the evil we have done and that we do—not only from each other but from ourselves as well.

But Jesus saw it all clearly.

He saw that the same people who were shouting, *“Blessed is He he who comes in the name of the Lord”* in a few days would be shouting, *“Crucify Him!”*

He saw that the mouths that sang, “Hosanna to the King of kings,” would in a few days be yelling, “We have no king but Caesar.” He saw that the mouths that sang, *“Hosanna to the King of kings”* would in a few days be yelling, *“We have no king but Caesar.”*

And he knew that the road that was covered with palm leaves would lead him up the *via dolorosa*—the path of tears—to a bloody cross on a mountain called Golgotha: the place of the skull.

That is what Jesus saw on Palm Sunday as he rode into Jerusalem.

He saw the way things looked but he also saw the way things were.

And that is how Jesus sees you and me today.

Today we welcome him with shouts of hosannas, but before the week is gone, we will be adding our sins to the load he bore to the cross.

He hears what we say and he sees what we do but he still loves us with an everlasting love.

May the peace and healing power of that incomprehensible love fill your heart this Palm Sunday!

Amen.

