

**What If?**  
**March 16, 2008**  
**Palm Sunday**

What if Jesus had not directed his disciples to go to Jerusalem and prepare a place for them to gather for the Passover meal? What if Jesus had not broken bread and blessed wine and predicted that one would betray him and that Peter would deny him and that this would be the last meal with them before he would suffer and no longer be with them?

What if they had not argued over who was the greatest and not been reminded that the leader is one who serves rather than the one who is exalted? What if Jesus had not ridden into the city on the back of a young colt being greeted as the Messiah the one who would bring in a new kingdom, with the people saying "Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel"? What if Jesus had not reminded his disciples of the greatest commandment: "love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another, and by this all will know that you are my disciples if you love one another"? What if Jesus had not gone into the garden where the Chief priests and Roman soldiers found and arrested him? What if Jesus had answered Pontius Pilate's question - who are you, in a way that explained his vision, ideal and purpose and assured the Roman government that he was not a political threat? What if Jesus had not willingly and knowingly accepted the inevitability of his actions, words, influence as he conducted his short three year ministry across his country? What if Jesus had not knowingly walked into what he had to know was a death trap, on the day we call Palm Sunday?

You know what- then he would not be Jesus. There is no way I can imagine the story of the birth, life and death of Jesus happening in any other manner. There was no other outcome possible. This is what attracts

me to Jesus, this is what keeps the story of Jesus and the message of Jesus as one relevant to our living and to dying. This week is called Holy Week- it begins today by Palm Sunday followed by Maundy Thursday a time of trial and tribulation, followed by Good Friday- a qualifier for the day of Jesus' death, that I probably will never grasp, followed by Saturday a day of vigil and prayerful remembrance and preparation for the burial of Jesus who had died and Easter Sunday a day that heralds new possibilities, a day that is a reminder of eternal hope, renewal, rebirth, regeneration, restoration and, revival.

The Universalist minister Clinton Lee Scott wrote:

Jesus is risen from the dead.

The centuries have not been able to bury him  
Forsaken by his friends,  
Sentenced to die with thieves  
His mangled body buried in a borrowed tomb,  
He has risen to command  
The hearts of millions, and  
To haunt our hate-filled world,  
With the restlessness of undying hopes.  
... military might and political tyranny  
Still stalk the earth;  
They too shall perish,  
While the majesty of the carpenter-prophet  
Bearing his cross to the hill  
Will remain to rebuke the ways of violence. <sup>1</sup>

What if - what do I want to ask? Do I want to ask what if Jesus had not died, or had not prepared a band of followers to carry on, do I want

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl Seaburg and Mark Harris, *Celebrating Easter and Spring: An Anthology of Unitarian Universalist readings*, Cambridge Ma, the Anne Miniver Press, 2000 P 68

to ask what would have happened, what religious teachings would be around, what moral standings would we rely on? In part I guess I do but the fact is that somehow in some way whether as the bible tells us or as I chose to believe in a more symbolic manner Palm Sunday is a time for us to ask the What if questions in our own life?

What if you had not faced the hardest days in your life with some inner strength and sense of hope that you could get through, be it facing the death of a loved one, the loss of a relationship, a loss of health, wealth, or fortune?

What if you had no one to turn to, no church community to turn to when the days and nights seem endlessly overwhelming?

What if you had no relationships to nurture to tend to grow to delight in to find joy in?

What if you closed your heart, soul, mind to truths though hard to hear, none the less truths about you, about others, about circumstances about living?

What if you ran away from every tough decision, from every feeling, every difficulty and challenge?

What if? Go ahead fill in the blanks. I tell you this the losses, the grief, the pain, the difficulties would still be there, life is not fair, just, peaceful, full of calorie free lemon meringue pie or an endless supply of chocolate. But it is full of people who care, people who will go out of their way to demonstrate love, compassion, kindness and tenderness to support nurture and tend to others as they would like to be tended to. Palm Sunday for me is always a time to think about choices, about choosing and sometimes as in Jesus' life choosing the more difficult path. Two from within his inner circle, Judas and Peter are set apart as ones that betrayed him, I invite you to remember that at the dinner were at least 10 others and probably the home owner too, and in the garden,

Jesus was with two others not commonly considered his disciples. Remember always that there are those around you who choose to stay beside you, and if we follow the message Jesus gave- sometimes you must be that one to that demonstrate love to others.

What if we all learned to love and be loved in return? Would it matter?