Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This is your Palm Sunday letter. There was once an author by the name of Leo Buscaglia who wrote a book called “Love”. In his book he stated, “To live in love is life’s greatest challenge.” I have reflected on that quote over the years and I’ve come to understand that there is a love we have for our spouse, a love we have for our children, a unique love we have for our grandchildren and an extraordinary love we have for God. In each relationship this love is a lifetime commitment to embrace the challenges that come with the journey. There is hope, joy, peace, fear and tears in every relationship. Leo also wrote, “A person has no choice but to love. For when they do not, they find the alternatives lie in loneliness, destruction and despair.” Clearly I am not speaking about a romanticized infatuation but about a deep love that is willing to take many risks. I deeply appreciate Leo’s observation, “A total immersion in life offers the best classroom for learning to love.”

Today I want to address what some people consider the misunderstanding of the “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem. Some of the people had fallen in love with Jesus. Michael Battle writes, “To fall in love is to project the most noble part of one’s being onto another human being.” Is it possible that the people were so desperate to find a messiah to discover their king, that Jesus’ words and actions were enough for them to be “excited and enthralled” by him? Therefore, when it was time for a parade they were delighted to throw their coats and branches on the road to make way for his entry. And yet they did not fully understand the cost of his love for them. Jesus understood that he was to live, love, die and rise again for the salvation of humanity.

It is not fair for me to ask the question which relationships you’re willing to die for. There is no comparison between God’s love for us and our ability to love each other. For example, I would be willing to die for my wife and my children, but I would request, even prefer, that you would guarantee that it won’t hurt. But you see, that’s exactly the point, real love is not an infatuation. God’s love for us is not temporary. God’s love for us is about redemption.

Jesus understood that as he made his way into Jerusalem it would be the last time. He was already on “death row”. This was the meaning and purpose of his life. On Palm Sunday, people greeted Jesus as if he were a rock star. Some would say it was almost a 1960’s “Woodstock” scene. But that was not the intent. The intent was for Jesus to humbly and gracefully ride into the city on a donkey to announce his arrival offering his life as a gift in love for humanity. Jesus was preparing to die on the cross.

A great philosopher once wrote that loving is a willingness to suffer. The kind of love that Jesus showed was about endurance, compassion and suffering. Palm Sunday shows us that God’s love is often beyond our understanding. Therefore, how might we try to express God’s love in our relationships with others? Perhaps the answer is found in acts of compassion and clemency for the afflicted. There are many who are suffering this time of year. Some by grief or loss, some by loneliness, some in isolation, some in financial crisis and some yet to discover the faith that binds us all.

Simone Weil wrote, “Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention.” May I invite you to pray about those who are in need of your attention in these coming days? I realize that giving your attention is a difficult thing. It will take time, energy and a certain level of commitment, but it may well brighten the day for someone else; someone who has come to believe that we are a Good Friday people. There are some who believe that the darkness of the last year has overshadowed them and there is no way out. There are some who believe that there is little chance of recovery, little chance of healing and no way back to the way things were. They have lost their hope. I want to suggest to you that you and I are the **children of light** and if we can brighten the day for another human being, we may re-spark what once was their love for life. I know it’s a huge request, but I believe through the gift of the Holy Spirit, you are capable of offering this spark, indeed this new hope that is found in the resurrection. We are an Easter people. We believe in new beginnings. We believe in miracles. We believe in hope. May the love of Jesus shine in you today and may that light and hope encourage you to reach out to each other.

Enjoy your weekend.

Yours in Christ

Stephen