

## WHAT KIND OF JESUS?

Rev. Tom Momberg  
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church  
July 6, 2014

When I was a young boy, I learned to play the trumpet. On at least two Fourth of July weekends I organized a parade on our little street. It didn't matter how many boys or girls I could round up, as long as I could march up and down Deepwood Lane and play "My Country 'Tis of Thee." I was filled with patriotism, as well as a lot of boyish pride.

In my senior year of high school, the band director, told me I was good enough to play first chair, but I had a problem. I couldn't hit the high notes consistently, something a lead trumpeter needs to do. An oboe player, he knew little about playing brass. So my band director sent me off for some instruction.

At my first and only lesson, I played for less than a minute. The teacher said, "Stop! Your embouchure (where you place the mouthpiece on your mouth) is all wrong! How long have you been playing?" Eight years, I told him, feeling that pride again, because I had taught myself to play. "It will take you at *least* eight years to correct this!" he exclaimed. And I thought: Well, I guess from now on, I'll just sing.

Many years later I was privileged to be the tenor soloist in a parish production of Handel's *Messiah*. For me, there has never been anything quite like being the only one singing, while an entire orchestra accompanies *you*! Talk about pride! The orchestra included a young woman who played the trumpet with a skill and passion I had never experienced before.

Later in the performance, they played the aria that begins with the bass soloist proclaiming, "The trumpet shall sound..." Using a smaller horn called a piccolo trumpet, that woman soared, high and well - above the singer, the orchestra and everyone in the room. Her music took my breath away. When our concert was finished, I rushed over and praised her for how well she had played that little instrument. "Thanks," she said, matter-of-factly, adding, not-so-matter-of-factly, "It's a *girl* trumpet."

Sisters and brothers, there are girls in my life who are still teaching this boy how to do things, how to "get it" about their perspective - as clergy, as Christians, as people. Until I came here, I had never followed a woman rector before, nor have I ever had an all-girl band for a staff. I've learned a lot at St. Matthew's, including more about how not to toot my own horn.

In Handel's *Messiah* there is another solo, based on today's passage

from the prophet Zechariah: *Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice greatly!* This is the announcement of a coming king, riding into Jerusalem. It's part of an ancient expectation in Judaism. *The Messiah is coming! Your King's on his way!* I'm tempted to stop here and say, "Your new rector's on the way!"

This Zechariah passage plays an important role for Christians, who believe Jesus is that Messiah. Every Holy Week, we read some part of Zechariah. Today, when we heard "your King comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey," you may have traveled back in time to Palm Sunday. There's Jesus, riding on in majesty, and all of us in that triumphal procession with him, waving our palm branches. But sometimes, we forget there's more to that story. Sometimes, we forget who Jesus is, and we forget who we are. Sometimes, we march around, playing our trumpets, waving our palms, and we just don't get it.

In today's gospel passage, Jesus tries to tell the people of his day that *they* just don't "get it." First, they didn't get it about John the Baptist, and then, they *really* didn't get it about Jesus. Before our passage starts, all through the first twenty-three verses of Matthew's eleventh chapter, Jesus is becoming more and more frustrated. It's not just his disciples who drive him crazy. It's the entire society, the whole generation, the people of God who, when it's appropriate, do not sing or dance. They don't even weep or mourn for a world whose burden is heavy, for a people who need rest.

The people of Jesus' generation don't get what's happening. Nor do the people of Matthew's generation. Nor do we. In 1971, Motown artist Marvin Gaye released an album that was to become a landmark in popular music. The songs formed a larger story, told from the perspective of a Vietnam War veteran, who had just returned home to the country he'd been fighting for. Looking around, he sees nothing but injustice, suffering and hatred. The refrain? "Picket lines and picket signs / don't punish me with brutality / talk to me, so you can see / what's goin' on, what's goin' on."

In this, the land of the free and the home of the brave, will we pay attention to "what's goin' on" with, say, the immigration situation? Is our society willing to wake up and smell our own privilege amidst the stink of others' poverty? Will this nation ever "get it" about guns and violence?

Dare we take Jesus at his word, we who call ourselves Episcopalians, we who tend to see ourselves as wiser, more intelligent, better educated Christians? Will we listen to the infants, the girls and the boys among us? Can we hear those who are far from our spheres of influence - both the youngest and the oldest among us? Have we been to a pre-school or a vacation bible school or a retirement community or a nursing home lately?

**In the last semester of my senior year at seminary, our dean took us on retreat. One of the things he said to us will, I pray, stay with me as long as I live. He told us that, as we prepared to be ordained, we would likely get caught up in what looks, sounds and feels more like a coronation than an ordination. "When that happens," he said, "remember this: You are not Jesus. You are the donkey. You carry Jesus."**

**What kind of rector do you need? Someone who toots his own horn? Someone who's afraid to be a donkey - or can't stop being one? Or do you need someone who "gets it" about Jesus and when she doesn't, can see she doesn't know what she doesn't know? Is it someone who will carry Jesus?**

**In last week's sermon, I shared a phrase from a church sign: "Jesus: America's Most Needed." As St. Matthew's Search Committee and Vestry pray about which of the final rector candidates they believe you need, I invite you to pray about a larger question. While they pray about what kind of rector St. Matthew's needs, why don't you pray about this: *What kind of Jesus do you need?***

**I don't know about you, but I need a Jesus who invites me to come to him, speaking "comfortable words." I need a Jesus who, after confronting me with the hard edge of Gospel truth, invites me into his loving arms. I need a Jesus who knows the trouble I've seen, who knows the burdens I carry, who knows how deeply my body and soul long for rest.**

**In other words, I need a Jesus who "gets it" about me. I need a Jesus who both comforts me and challenges me. I need a Jesus who shows me how his yoke - his call to partnership with him, his call to a closer walk with him, his call to get "in sync" with him - will help me "get it" about him and about my life. I need a Jesus who reminds me, at the end of a Fourth of July weekend, that serving him and serving *with* him is *perfect* freedom.**

**We need a Jesus who will help us put down our horns and carry him.**