

WHAT IF YOU WERE THERE?

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be living in Jesus' time? Would you have written him off as another crazy itinerant preacher or been attracted to him not just for the miracles he performed but for something deeper you couldn't fully put into words?

Let's imagine for a moment that you are back in Jerusalem some 2000 years ago. It's getting close to the feast of Passover and people are stocking up on provisions for the sacred day. You're shopping at your favorite booth in the city's vendors' area and suddenly you hear the sound of a crowd coming closer. "Hosanna to the Son of David," they keep chanting. The cheer gets louder and you see people laying down palm branches in front of Jesus who is riding on a donkey making its way into the city. Maybe he really is the Messiah, you think as you quickly pay for your flour and draw closer. Jesus looks at you with a loving gaze that seems to peer into your deepest being and bathe your spirit in peace and assurance. The doubts are over, you tell yourself. Jesus is not merely just another preacher. There's something different about him. He is the Messiah. You pick up a palm branch and join in. "Hosanna to the Son of David. Hosanna!"

As you go about preparing for the Seder meal the next few days, you keep reliving that moment when your eyes met his and the sense of calm and love grew even deeper—the Messiah has come. You have seen him. And things can only get better for you and all the other Jews who had lived through so much oppression and suffering. Their day has come and you are there to witness it—what a great privilege!

Suddenly your peace is disturbed by the cries of a crowd—this time an angry mob shouting "Crucify him!" What had anyone done to get them so stirred up? And who could this unfortunate be? You wipe your hands on your apron and run to the street. You can't believe what you see. It's Jesus, his body bloodied, carrying that cross, wearing a crown of thorns. He's the one they want dead. There must be a mistake. What has he done? Just a few days ago, they were praising him, calling him "Son of David, Messiah." What has he done in those few short days to deserve this? You draw closer and ask someone, "How did this happen?" You're told the chief priests had accused him of blasphemy and Pilate had given in to their demands to kill him when they

reminded him that a Messiah, a new king could be a threat to Rome.

That peace you felt just a few moments ago is getting replaced by fear. You follow along, but at a distance. You see Jesus fall. A reluctant man is forced into helping him carry the heavy cross. You see him lock pain-seared eyes with family, friends, and followers along the way. You also see some of those who were closest to him running away. You want to join them, go back to everyday things, but something draws you to follow—though a little further behind now.

He's arrived at Golgotha. You see the soldiers hoist his bruised body onto the cross and hear the sound of the hammers as they nail him to it. The soldiers are casting lots for his garments. His mother and a few friends are standing at the foot of the cross, weeping. Time seems to be standing still as this horrible event unfolds. You try to recapture the peace you felt a few short days ago when your eyes locked. All you feel now is emptiness and loss. You hear him cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and then "It is finished." He is dead. All the promise has gone. You weep as you make your way home. You'll never be taken in by promises again. The Messiah really isn't coming.

A deep sadness stays with you over the next few days. Often you cry and think of what might have been. When things seem too good to be true, they usually aren't. Remember that.

A neighbor knocks on your door. You have gone to hear Jesus preach with him. He says one of Jesus' disciples is saying he is risen as he said—the tomb is empty! You've got to learn more. You rush to where the disciples are staying behind locked doors in an upper room. You bang loudly and ask if it's really true. Is the tomb really empty? They're still afraid of what the Jews might do to them so they don't open the door, but someone says "That's what John and Peter said."

You return home confused—afraid, but hopeful. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus is the Messiah. The warmth of his gaze is easier to recapture now. It's been an amazing week.

-Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate

