

I was 11 years old when the movie, 'Titanic,' was released on VHS.

It was released on September 1, 1998.

Yes, I actually do know what a VHS is, and I know that they can only hold so many hours of footage.

Now, Titanic was a long movie, so it came on 2 VHS tapes, the first half of the movie was on one tape, then you had to switch the tapes and finish the movie on the 2<sup>nd</sup> tape.

In our household, that first VHS tape got watched so many times, it became unwatchable.

I guess the film got ruined from overuse by a certain 11 year old.

But the 2<sup>nd</sup> VHS tape, that had the second half of the movie on it, that tape hardly got watched at all.

It's probably still in pristine condition at my parents' house.

You see, I loved the first half of the movie Titanic.

I liked the dramatic story of Jack getting a ticket for the trans-Atlantic journey, and then his meeting Rose who was in first-class, and their falling in love, and all the ornate beauty of the ship.

I got caught up in the splendor and drama.

But the second half, no thanks.

You had to switch tapes right after the boat hit the iceberg and the water was flooding into the ship and Jack and Rose were running around trying to find safety as their staterooms filled with water.

I saw the whole movie once in the theater, but I never watched that second tape.

I couldn't handle the pain, the heartbreak, the desperation of the people who didn't make it onto the lifeboats.

And then, the worst part, (spoiler alert for anyone who hasn't seen it), I really lost it when Jack drowned because there was no room for him on the floating piece of wood that allowed Rose to survive.

I watched that scene once, never again, never that second tape.

I couldn't handle it, 11 year old me wanted the love and beauty and not the pain and death.

Now, I probably shouldn't admit this since I am a pastor and I am supposed to be a beacon leading you all through the hell of Holy Week, but I think the way I felt about the Titanic story is how I felt, until recently, about Jesus' journey into Jerusalem.

I really like today's story, and I'm okay with Maundy Thursday, there's something powerful about Jesus eating a meal with his friends, but I don't like what comes next.

I want to stop the movie there.

I don't need to see what happens on that second tape.

I'd like Jesus to have dinner with his friends, nobody betrays him or arrests him or beats him or kills him.

He simply eats with them, they celebrate Passover, then he goes to bed and then wakes up the next morning and continues his ministry.

I want to jump into the story and change everything the characters do and change the ending.

First, I will tell Jesus not to overturn the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple, because in some Gospel stories, this is what he does between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday and this is what gets the attention of the authorities.

So, I would tell Jesus to behave himself in Jerusalem.

In this story that we heard this morning, the Pharisees tell him to have his disciples stop shouting, it's like they're saying, *"Tell your people to be quiet. If they draw ire from the authorities then we are all going to be in trouble, and we just want to celebrate the Passover in peace, so make them quiet down."*

I'd tell Jesus to listen to the Pharisees for once, fly under the radar.

Then, as director of this show, I'd tell Peter and Judas not to betray him but to stay loyal, it's not that hard.

Then, I'd tell the whole crowd to advocate for Jesus *and* Barabbas to be released, because I don't really like the idea of anyone being crucified.

Then if everyone followed my instructions, Jesus would live and would be able to continue his ministry and I could watch the movie all the way to the end.

Now there are many problems with this scenario, but among them, while I am here thinking that I want to rewrite this story and leave Good Friday on the editing room floor, it occurs to me that God *did* rewrite the story.

It does have a happy ending.

I was limiting my own imagination and God's power, getting so stuck in the tragedy that I lost scope of what comes after Good Friday, none other than the Resurrection, rebirth, life after death, good over evil, everyone living happily ever after! (Sort of.)

God took the ultimate tragedy that had to occur in order for us to understand the evil that humans are capable of, and used that experience for good.

So when I think about it that way, I am not so wary about journeying with Jesus into Jerusalem.

No, I can't rewrite the story and I can't tell the cast of characters to do something different, but that's okay because I know the ending to the story, I know it will be resolved.

I know that love wins.

I used to feel like there was no way that I could celebrate Jesus' processional into the Holy City because I knew what came next, I knew the dark cloud that ominously loomed over the whole story.

I didn't blame Jesus' followers for singing and praising and laying their clothing down because they didn't know what was to come, they were in the moment, they were celebrating their beloved teacher and healer.

They didn't have a crystal ball or the Gospels written down, they didn't have the burden of knowing what transpired over the course of the week.

But I couldn't celebrate with them, because I was blessed or cursed with knowing what came next.

This is called dramatic irony, when the audience knows more about the story than the characters do.

This irony is most often used in tragedies and I thought, "Ah ha, makes sense because this story is a tragedy," but I had to shake myself out of that mindset.

It was too easy for me to become afraid of the pain and suffering, that I wasn't willing to journey through it to the other side, to be reminded that the story isn't a tragedy at all.

I just wanted to watch the first half of the movie, because I wanted to avoid the pain and death but I was also denying myself the beautiful culmination of the story.

To want to avoid all pain and discomfort out of fear is to doubt God and the whole Easter story.

If we are unable to believe that the Resurrection really is a life-giving miracle, then we will get stuck in the mindset of wanting to deny Jesus' crucifixion.

But if we trust that God has re-written the story, that love will prevail in the end, and if we rely on God's strength, then we can journey through Thursday night and Friday and all day Saturday.

We can walk with Jesus' disciples and sing and praise God, knowing full well what comes later this week, because we also know what comes next Sunday.

It might feel like a burden to know that Jesus is literally processing to his death, but it's a gift to know that he'll soon experience everlasting life.

It's true that his disciples didn't know his death was imminent, but they didn't know his Resurrection was either, and you can't have one without the other.

Now, in our daily lives, we find ourselves in similar situations to the disciples.

We don't know what's coming next.

We haven't read the whole story of our lives.

We are constantly making decisions based on past experiences, doing our best to live into the future.

Since we can't predict the future, and we don't know exactly the route to take, we have to make choices.

We can be like the disciples, singing Jesus' praises and blessing him.

We can choose to rely on God, to give of what we have (like his followers gave their coats, and this is before people had closets full of clothing).

We can trust that God is rewriting the story and that peace and justice will have the final word, and we can live into this stubborn optimism.

It's our job, as the church, to be God's faithful ones, to live into the ending that God is rewriting.

Jesus' walk into Jerusalem was very ominous, and we have such moments in our lives.

Perhaps it's personal, like when you are preparing to speak to someone you are angry with, you can choose to act faithfully, to speak words of patience, kindness and understanding.

Or you can challenge God, like the Pharisees did.

You can use fear, hatred and vitriol to try to prevent God's love from prevailing on Earth (it won't work though, as hard we might try).

This ominous walk can also be collective, as we slowly plod onto the battlefield for the fight on November 8<sup>th</sup>.

We can choose to give into hatred and we can betray God the way Peter and Judas did.

Or we can be the faithful ones, who are convinced that God will take whatever situation we've created, as messy as it might be, and use it as an opportunity for justice and peace to rule the day.

If God could make good out of Jesus' capital punishment, God can work with whatever mess we create.

But we, Christ's followers, we must not refuse to go through the hard stuff.

We must not resist the Palm Sunday celebrations because we know that Good Friday looms.

We are called to be like Jesus' ragtag group of enthusiasts, even like the stones who would shout out, to trust God all the way through the journey.

Let us not be doubtful and foolish people who refuse to watch the second half of the movie.

May we trust God enough to journey with one another and with God through the pain, and trust that God is rewriting the story, and relying on God's grace, trust that, in the end, love *will* prevail.

Amen.