

The Eyes of Jesus

On a perfect spring day, the Judean sun shines brightly on the holy city. If you look into the eyes of the One riding into Jerusalem, you'll see the whole scene reflected. The great, flowing, coursing, surging, throng of his followers—casting down their cloaks before the hooves of the donkey's colt. Chanting joyously! Singing praise songs! Shouting accolades—*Blessed is the King who comes in God's name! Peace!* With many thousands in town to celebrate the Passover, the whole city's in festival mode. If you watch closely, you might even see a smile play across the face of the One astride the colt.

But his eyes tell a different story. This parade that first-century and twenty-first century disciples think of as a triumphal entry? He knows it's not so. He knows he's not the king they're expecting, the king they want, the one who'll deliver them from the Roman occupiers.

And he knows what awaits him. He knows that more than anything else, this parade is—in reality—a funeral procession. You can see it in his eyes.

Have you ever wondered what his eyes were like? I've always pictured him as having beautiful, dark, deep-set eyes. Maybe you've envisioned him that way, too. But we know that there were times when he wept.

Now the parade's ended. The sun's hidden its face. He looks at the city spread out before him. And once again, he weeps. Weeps for Jerusalem that will not know peace because it did not recognize the time of God's coming to it. If you look into his eyes, you see tears.

And he enters the temple. Overturns the money-changers' tables and drives out the merchants, making their ears tingle with the words of Israel's prophets: *My temple should be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves!* If you look into his eyes, you see anger.

But now let's leave the temple. And fast-forward to the fifth day of the week. In accordance with the age-old tradition of his people, Passover begins as the sun sets and the shadows fall. All the preparations have been made. He's been anticipating this

holy meal. Looking forward to this meal. Longing to share this final time of table fellowship with these intimate friends.

Gathering at last around the table, he looks at each familiar face. The faces of his followers. His twelve. If you look into his eyes, you see love.

It's not till after the supper that he tells them what he knows. That one of them—right here at this table—will betray him. One after another, they ask: *Is it I, Lord! Is it I?* They don't know which one it is. But *he* knows. And he knows it's one of these that he called—one who's been his disciple, been with him for *three years*. He knows, too, that before this night is over, another of these closest to him will deny having any relationship with him at all. If you look into his eyes, you see sorrow.

He can't stay in that upstairs room any longer. He *has* to get out of there—to get to the place where he and the others have been so many times before. In the garden, he leaves them and goes off a ways by himself. And there in the darkness of Gethsemane, among the ancient olive groves, he prays. Does he pray for another path to walk, *any* path other than this one? Does he pray that it might be possible for him to just turn around and head back to Nazareth? Return to the trade of a carpenter? *Abba,*

Father—if you are willing, remove this cup from me. If you look into his eyes, you see pleading.

But the prayer's not yet over. His prayer ends with these words: *Not my will but yours be done.*

And now here's the betrayer, running up as if to kiss him, at the head of a crowd. A mob. Chief priests. Elders. And the temple police, with swords and clubs. Come for him. The eleven scatter. Flee. Desert him. Abandon him as he's arrested, led away, taken to the high priest's house. But if you look into his eyes, you see courage.

Later, if you're watching what happens in the courtyard of the high priest during that long night, you spot the disciple who's been the spokesperson of the twelve. The leader. There's been no more constant or loyal follower. You hear someone say: *You must have been with him—you've got Galilean written all over you!* And you hear that disciple answer: *How many times do I have to tell you—I don't know him!* Then you see that very One, inside the house, turn and look at his disciple. A long, penetrating gaze. And if you look into his eyes, you see sadness.

Then they blindfold him. He can't see those who jeer at him. Who taunt him. Who slap him and punch him again and

again. If you could lift that blindfold and look into his eyes, you'd see suffering.

Finally, at daybreak, they take him before the Sanhēdrin. Before the high council. At the end of the interrogation they demand: *Are you the Son of God?* And he answers: *You say that I am.* That's all. Yet the verdict is guilty. But if you look into his eyes, you see resolve.

Resolve to not waver. To not save himself. But to endure all that lies ahead in order to redeem you and me and all of us who have abandoned him. Who have denied him. Who have betrayed him.

And so, beloved, as you and I journey with Jesus through this holiest of weeks, we can't go with him only part of the way. He calls us to walk with him *all* the way. And I can think of no better way to do that than—at this particular moment—to let Luke, that marvelously gifted preacher, take over. And to hear the words *he* has for us today.

Luke's account of the Passion of Jesus Christ: