

ST. FRANCIS EPISCOPAL CHURCH
VICTORIA TEXAS

Palm Sunday, 2009

John 12:12-16

The Reverend Faith Bledsoe

You know it's funny what you see from up here – the tower at the East gate. I'm here everyday from dawn to dusk; one of the Imperial Roman Guard. Just a foot soldier really, but guarding the gate is a real responsibility. You just never know who might try to sneak in! And through this gate especially. You see, the East gate generally is the way for the riffraff – you know, the shepherds with their flocks for market; those poor slobs who eek out a living in the dirt and come to the city once or twice a year for some festival or other; peddlers looking for suckers; well, you know the type. And the last few days the crowds have been growing – that Jewish festival, they call it Passover, is later this week. So folks are flocking to the city. Times like this at the East gate, you just never know what you're going to see.

The West gate – they say that's one you want to guard – it's for the moneyed, the powerful, the government types. They say those are the ones you have to watch, but for my money, it's the ones coming through my gate that are the threat. You just never know what they'll try to pull. They're just stupid enough to try anything. So you've really got to be on your toes here. Yes sir, really got to be on your toes.

And you know, I sort of enjoy it, watching the folks come through here – they're colorful, lots of chatter and I like to watch the kids. Once I saw a boy, not even 10 years old, with two cages of doves balanced on his head, walking just as easily as you or I. I've seen camels loaded with all kinds of cargo; shepherds working huge flocks with just a dog on one end; folks moving into the city and folks just passing through. You can tell who's coming here for the first time. Their eyes are wide, never blinking for fear of missing something. I do enjoy watching them. And, as I say, you just never know what you're going to see.

Like there, see that man on the donkey in the middle of that crowd? I wondered what those guys wanted with that donkey. I saw them this morning right after I came on duty. There were two of them and they spoke with the old guy right inside the gate and then walked away with the donkey. And now they're back. Only this time, there's a whole crowd surrounding the fellow on the donkey. What did I tell you? You just never know what you're going to see.

Hmmm...what's that they're carrying? Branches - Hey there! Don't tear that tree down! You leave that be! I'm telling you, they'll tear down the city if we let them! And will you look at that? Now they're taking off their cloaks and laying them on the ground for the donkey to walk on. Well, for Caesar's sake, you would think that guy was a king! Now they're standing naked in the street shouting Hosanna of all things! Seems like every other week they're touting one fellow or another as king. If it's a Messiah they're looking for, they need only turn to Caesar! He is the one true king! Well, as I say, you just never know what you're going to see from up here.

And there you are, someone's alerted the authorities and the guard has been called out. Days like this, I'm glad I up here out of the mess. And besides I can see the whole picture from up here. Like those guys over there – behind that corner. They don't think anyone can see them, much less recognize them. But I see them and I know who they are. You can learn a lot by watching; by being quiet and on the lookout.

Those are Caiaphas' henchmen; priests my foot, more like tattle-tails and power-mongers. Caiaphas, he's what the Jews call the high priest and he is one nasty fellow. Power hungry if you ask me; doesn't like anyone nosing in on his territory. Now I have to say, he knows how to go along to get along. He knows if he can keep those Jews in line, he will have it easy with Pilate, with more than a few kickbacks off the side, I'm sure. Those men over there, they're here most every day. I understand there's another set at the West gate. They're watching for anyone who might be a threat to the Jewish

authorities, especially Caiaphas. What these guys don't know is I'm watching them!

Yep, the guard is ready, riot gear and all. Those poor suckers down there don't know what's waiting for them around the corner. They better cut out the shouting and cover themselves up. In this crowd it won't take much to set off that regiment and then those cloaks won't just be covered with dirt, they'll be caked with blood and the street will be littered with bodies.

Who is that guy? Now there are people from the city coming to greet him and laying their cloaks on the ground. And, HEY! HEY! Well, there goes the tree. There they go waving branches again like he's a king. They act like this is a party in the street -- shouting, singing, waving those leaves. I have to tell you I've never seen anything like this and I've been in the tower for nearly a year now. They do seem to be having a good time though.

It looks like he's on his way to the Temple. And there go those priests, just ahead of the crowd, like rats running a maze for the treat of cheese at the end. They are up to no good I tell you. See what I mean? You never know what you're going to see from here.

The crowd is getting louder. I can't quite make it out -- Son of David? My crown, they do think he's their Messiah. They're naming him a king I tell you. There'll be trouble for that, you can be sure. There's only one king and the road is lined with those strung up for saying otherwise. At least he doesn't seem to be encouraging them. On the other hand he's not discouraging them either. He could get off and walk. That would show them!

He's no king, that's for sure. Kings don't arrive at the East gate and certainly not on the back of a donkey surrounded by a crowd of riffraff who make a scene shouting and tearing off their clothes. I wonder if this has something to do with that Passover festival? I've never seen this before, but then I've never really paid much attention to those festivals.

Well, there he goes, just about to turn the corner to the Temple. Wait, he's stopping. He's turned to look this way. Why, why he's looking at me! My crown, his eyes are dark...and never-blinking. Not like those who've never been here before, but like, well like he has been here and he knows things. Boy, those eyes draw you in. I can see, even without hearing him speak, why the crowd has gathered around him. Those eyes have the look of wisdom. And there's a kind of sadness too, almost like he hears the cry of the poor before he sees their faces. Still, he doesn't look like much of a Messiah to me; certainly not someone to lead armies or crush the empire.

Now he's saying something. What's that? He's too far away for me to hear. It looks like... what? Fall over? Follow me? Follow me! Yes, that's it -- follow me. Follow me? Why would I do that? Why would he say that? Why would he say that to me? I'm no Jew. I don't go to Temple. I'm certainly not going to follow him riding a donkey! I have an important job here. I'm one of the royal guard! ... Stop staring at me. It's not like I'm going to come down from here. Well, I'm not, I'm just not....

There, he's saying it again. Follow me. Maybe he thinks he's in danger and is asking for my help. Well, maybe I could...no, no, I can't leave my post and there are lots of other guards down there if the crowd gets out of control. He's still just sitting there, looking at me, like he's waiting for something. The crowd's getting restless; wondering what's going on I suppose. Some of them are beginning to look up here. Move on! You need to keep moving! Stay there much longer and those guards in the next street over will begin to move. Then you'll be sorry. Go on, keep moving!

Finally, he's moving. Nearly to the corner now. No, don't turn around! Well at least he's not stopping. There are those eyes again; they speak even without words. You know, I wonder...nah. Well, like I say, you never know what you're going to see from up here. I know I won't forget those eyes anytime soon.

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