

What do you do when you get an invitation? Do you ignore it, accept it or reject it? I guess it all depends on where the invitation comes from. I get more invitations in the mail to retirement planning seminars than anything else. This past week I was invited to learn about a new hearing aid. I've been invited to join AARP more times than I want to think about. I only 57 and have a son in college and a daughter graduating from High School this year. I can't even begin to think about retirement. So I ignore all of those invitations.

Jesus, like all Israelites, was invited to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. It was an annual goal to be in Jerusalem for the Passover. But this year was different. The Jewish authorities had threatened Jesus. They may have even posted an arrest warrant for Him that read like this:

WANTED: JESUS THE NAZARENE

He shall be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy.

Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.

Anyone who knows where he is, let him declare it to the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

Since Jesus and the people of Israel knew about this threat, the big debate in Jerusalem before the Passover that year was whether or not Jesus would come. Jesus had to decide what He would do. Jesus didn't allow His decision to be influenced by popular opinion. He wasn't afraid of the powers that threatened Him. So Jesus decided to accept the invitation. He went to Jerusalem for the Passover.

But why did Jesus decide to go? He didn't go for recognition, to please the people. He was already the most popular person in Israel. He was so popular that the religious leaders of the nation felt threatened by Him. He didn't go to seek revenge. His goal was not to put the Scribes and Pharisees in their place. He didn't go to start a rebellion. That's what the people wanted. They wanted Jesus to liberate them from Roman rule, to free the nation and restore power and prosperity.

Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with His disciples. We'll talk more about this on Thursday night at our Maundy Thursday service. Jesus went to Jerusalem because He knew that there was a cross in His future. He didn't go to Jerusalem for recognition, revenge or to lead a rebellion. He went to redeem us, to buy us back from sin and death.

The prophet Isaiah predicted Jesus' suffering when he wrote, **“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that**

brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:4-5) After Peter made his confession of faith said that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus then began to explain to the disciple what that meant. Matthew 16:21 reports, “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” On the night of His arrest, Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) The people who mocked Jesus while he hung on the cross didn’t realize how true their words were when they said, “He saved others, but He can’t save Himself.” (Matthew 27:42) Jesus had to lose His life to save us.

But that is not the end of the story. Jesus finished the work of redemption on the cross, he paid the price in full to set us free. Then His body was placed in a tomb, but the tomb couldn’t hold him. Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday morning. He rose to prove that sin and death had been defeated.

But that too is not the end of the story. Jesus entered Jerusalem as the people shouted, “Hosanna.” The word hosanna literally means help us or save us. On Palm Sunday, the people shouted their hosannas to Jesus as a cheer for the one they thought would be able to save them from the Romans. But Jesus didn’t save the people from Roman rule. He saved them from something greater. He came to save them from sin, guilt and shame. And he started with his disciples. The disciples deserted Jesus when he was arrested. Peter denied knowing Jesus while the trial was taking place. But Jesus didn’t desert them or deny them. He appeared to them on Easter, he forgave them and assured them. He saved them from sin and guilt, shame and death.

But that too is not the end of the story because Jesus came to rescue, to redeem, to restore all people. Jesus said, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:17) We receive the benefit of what Christ has done by faith, when we put our trust in Him.

But God’s gifts are not just for us. We are forgiven to forgive. In Colossians 3:13 we are told, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” We are loved to love. Jesus said, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34) We are blessed to be a blessing to others. And the greatest blessing that we can give to others is to tell them about God’s love for them in Christ. We are His P.R. agents in our world today. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”

The Lord is inviting us today to follow Him to the cross and then to the empty tomb. He is inviting us to walk with Him in faith and receive his gifts of love, forgiveness and life. And He is

encouraging us to bring others with us. What are you going to do with this invitation? Don't ignore it. Don't turn it down. Receive it with joy and accept the invitation to follow Jesus. Amen.