

We Should Have Known – Rev. Dr. Alan Dorway

Matthew 21:1-11

April 5, 2020 – Palm Sunday

In 2014, I had the honor of being a minister commissioner to General Assembly. I have a jaded view of larger denominational and governmental structures. Yet I felt like it was my duty to accept the nomination and make at least one pilgrimage to GA. Before I left, I received plenty of material outlining my roll, what committee I would serve, how to access the private server with all motions, plus background, with debate notes and viewpoints, and more. I read and prepared as best I could, got on the plane, flew to Detroit, and jumped into the fray.

Here's the thing, I had a good time. I reconnected with friends from seminary, from a three-year grant study, from my former presbytery, and met many others who were great. My committee was more interesting than I thought. I watched as good people debated, disagreed, struggled, prayed, worshipped, and as a group, eventually decided.

Now, every GA has positives and negatives, so our presbytery put together discussion groups at various churches to reflect, talk, and listen to each other as we processed together the actions, and decisions from the meeting. Wow, if we think politics are charged now, then you have never gone to one of these church debriefings.

At the host church, we had a format including welcome, prayer, general sharing from our presbytery executive, sharing from the commissioners, practical steps in our presbytery, and lastly, an open time of questions. It all seemed to go well, but there was a last part: questions. I get it, good people were angry, confused, and wanted answers.

Corey, Dean, and others were great at responding when one vocal person wanted to know exactly how the commissioners voted on the controversial issues.

I stared at the floor praying to God I would not have to stand up to share that answer.

Not because I was embarrassed or ashamed, I don't like conflict.

Again, Corey and Dean were excellent explaining our governance did not force anyone to reveal their votes because after discernment, that vote is between each person and God.

But the gist of the questions and frustration was we have a need to know and we should have known how these commissioners voted to really make sure they represented us.

Just a quick side note, we are not a representative democracy in the church. Elders are the spiritual leaders of the congregation making decisions seeking Christ first. Even at the expense of not pleasing the congregation.

The pastor's job is similar. This is our practice together, listening to each other, but always moving where scripture, prayer, and the Spirit lead.

I went to only one more focus group, there were four, yet this began in my mind the question about need and should. What do we need to know? What should we know?

We want to know about so many things. We feel like we need to know facts of who, what, when, where, how, and why.

It can seem like we need to know every small detail of small detail, added to every side of a decision or debate or process, with more information and facts we agree with or can latch on to, and we also want to add our spin and have our input included.

We need to know because we like to be in the know, have some control, and be important. We desire to be treated with respect, as an equal, as valid to the outcome as everyone else.

Those following Jesus need to know. Who's the greatest in your kingdom? What is the most important commandment? When is the end? Where did you get your authority?

How did you multiply the loaves and fishes? Why are your teachings so hard?

We ask the same questions. Who is going to be saved? What will happen? When will you help me, reconcile me, restore me, justify me, support me? Where were you when these things happened?

How can I still believe when there is so much evil around me?
Why are you so distant? We need to know. Just make it clear to us, the followers then and now say. We need to know.

It kills us when someone throws back in our face, this is need to know information, and you don't need to know.

Of course, we need to know! This is our tension with God. We take steps of faith, we risk, we believe, we have staked our lives on Jesus the way, so God, we need to know who, what, when, where, how and why. We say God is God and his ways are above our ways and his foolishness is greater than the collective wisdom of our day, but Jesus, we need to know.

Should is different. Should is the past tense of shall. Should is a more polite way to express obligation, probability, or expectation. We should be done with this sermon in 20 minutes.

Rather than tell me to my face, after 20 minutes, people politely remind me of the expectation the service should be done in a decent and orderly manner and before other churches get their online delivery orders in.

Should also reflects on the future from a past realization. We should have figured out that Pastor Alan's sermons will be longer online because he's not directly looking at the clock at the back of the sanctuary and there is no one falling asleep in front of him. This statement is made later this morning and impacts the way we hear sermons online next week.

We could argue, the followers of Jesus, should know after the temptation in the wilderness he was not into empire building. The followers of Jesus should not be surprised when in a crowd, Jesus stops for an ill woman, a blind man, or a tax collector. Jesus should care for the sick and ill because he said that's what he was here to do.

The disciples should have known Jesus was talking about the resurrection when he told them the temple would be torn down and in three days it would rise again. The disciples should understand when Jesus tells Peter about three denials, it would happen.

We should know Jesus has a plan. We should understand life is better and worse than we want. We should be grateful for how we are blessed rather than wish for what another has. We should have prayed more. We should have had more faith because scripture does say if we had faith, then we could move mountains.

The truth is neither need or should is good news.

Today is Palm Sunday. Jesus and his disciples were traveling when he sent two of them ahead to get a donkey and colt.

What if as they walked to the next village they said, why are we doing this? What is this purpose? How can we just take a donkey, sure Jesus said we could do this, but really, some owner just giving it to us because the Lord needs them? We need to know.

Let's just stop, this makes no sense and we need to know, so we're going to march right back to Jesus and say, listen, we need to know what's going on? Why are we going to Jerusalem? Where is the kingdom? Is this the revolution, we need to know; and we're not moving until you explain it to us.

Even with the quote from Zechariah 9:9, doesn't it seem like the disciples need to know what's going to be going down from this day through the crucifixion? This is a reasonable request, if not for the whole group, then at least for the twelve?

Didn't those putting down palm branches and singing along the route Jesus rode into Jerusalem need to know what was going on?

They needed to know the king today would be the criminal at the end of the week, right? There are information holes in all of this. Where are the briefings where we get the details behind each action? Where is the memo with the plan and steps to achieve it?

Didn't the others in Jerusalem need to know the radical rabbi coming into the city would affect them, how that would cause traffic jams, frustrate the selling in the temple later, and end in a secretive execution decision? Did anyone get the right permits for this? We need to know.

Looking back on it, as we read today, we think, really, those two going to get the donkey and the colt, they should have known what

prophecy there were enacting. The people should know claims of king other than Caesar end up poorly.

The disciples should understand the purpose of this entrance. The people of the city should know who Jesus is, we do. Those in the city should have not said, who is this, but yes, the king of kings has come.

Don't we expect the followers, disciples, people along the road, and the city to reflect, we should have known.

We should have known God's plan and Jesus' purpose. We didn't put it together, but we should have known.

The need and should we demand of Jesus never brings peace or good news.

Yet we fall into this trap. Jesus, we need to know what your purpose is. We need to know the exact steps to follow you and the minimum or maximum to get us into heaven. We need to be right, so we need to know your will.

Later, we should know what your purpose is Jesus. We should know the exact steps needed to follow you. We should understand the requirements of faith. We should be right if we use Jesus' name, shouldn't we? Life didn't turn out our way, we should have known better the will of God.

Round and round we go beating ourselves up because we're frustrated we did not get to know and disappointed because we should have more faith. It's paralyzing and we feel this burden of needs and shoulds tear us down and plague our minds.

We sin, make mistakes, put our foot in our mouths, we are human, we hold up false images of others knowing when we should have known, others getting all the answers right when we should have as well, thinking we knew the path getting crossed up trying to turn back as we should, and the punishment for not knowing and should do cripples our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

We are in a perfect storm of this right now. We need to know all about the coronavirus. We need to know the latest information. We should have known this would happen and acted faster.

We should have been prepared.

We need to know where supplies are and should be told who's exploiting us with exorbitant prices on sanitizer, toilet paper, and masks. We should know exactly when things are going to get back to normal. We need to know Jesus, so if you're silent, then we may just latch onto any talking head spitting out their thoughts as facts.

Yes, there's got to be a better way and Palm Sunday is a great example of following Jesus one day, one moment at a time.

We know, because we've read ahead and heard sermons, that after today, even with good polling numbers, this week gets worse for Jesus.

It's so bad, we need to brighten it up by labeling it good by the end of the week. I wonder, how would the disciples handled all of today and this week, if they knew. For all the needs and should, would this week have played out the same if Jesus' followers knew death awaited after such a joyous welcome?

We may not like the mystery and fluid nature of life, it's uncomfortable, things spring up and surprise us, tragedy happens, laughter comes from bizarre places, and the paradoxes and tension keep coming. God only asks us to follow now.

Seek first the kingdom is not a future endeavor, like tomorrow we will seek, but seek is now. Seek presently where Jesus is.

Jesus told two disciples to go and find. They may have had concerns, but they went. They found exactly what Jesus told them. The crowds praised God for prophecy fulfilled.

If they needed to know why, then they would have just watched a guy ride by on a donkey. The city was in turmoil because excitement and joy surprise us and can make us nervous, but it does no one any good in the city to think, well I should have known and I missed Jesus, so guess that's it.

Palm Sunday focuses on Jesus today. Scripture invites us to be present for what the Spirit is doing at this moment.

Yes, we are being prepared for tomorrow, but all we need to do is focus on what today brings.

God knows the future, but he does not dwell on shoulds because God forgives and wants us present with things now, not worrying about past failures or future expectations. This is not a trite practice of blissfully ignoring our pain in life.

Good Friday comes and God is present. Jesus does not leave our side and not needing to know or should have known changes that. The Holy Spirit helps us run into the city with joy and helps us put one foot in front before Golgotha.

We never thought Palm Sunday would be done virtually and that sunrise service would be on our own waking up like the women at first light. Jesus says focus on now, I am with you.

We should have known to pick up more Kleenex or grab an extra hand sanitizer a month ago. Jesus says, I am with you.

We need to know, how much longer and is that a cold, allergies, or just my mind playing tricks on me? Jesus never leaves our side, he is with you.

Reflecting on past mistakes, worrying about letting someone down, filling our mind with unreal expectations, wondering about the future, it is past and will come.

Jesus is here now. Follow him. Walk with him. Celebrate, cry, or be present for whatever today has. Morning will come. Love always has the final word, then, now and forever. Amen.