There is a literary genre that seems to be somewhat popular these days know as alternative history. These works usually focus on slight turns in historical events that change what the present would look like. Things such as Lee winning Gettysburg, Hitler consolidating his gains and not attacking Russia or Socrates helping Bill and Ted get an A on their history project. Well the last example may not really fall into this category but its still a great scene. The idea is that if at some hinge in history the result of a certain event differed we would be living in a much different world -- a world where visits to Paris would involve more lederhosen and fewer mimes. So today I want to posit something of an alternative history, where we sort of pretend that the mood of Palm Sunday stayed and ponder what would have happened if we had stopped here. What if we had stopped at the following reading? “The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’ The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’" So what if that was it? What if the crowd’s reaction to Jesus stayed the way it was today and didn’t go quickly downhill as we know actually happened?

To frame this question I want to take a look at something we find later in Matthew’s Gospel and it may sound a little strange at first, but I think I am going somewhere so stick with me and don’t click on a Debbie Gibson video instead. The part I am about to quote comes after the Last Supper but before the arrest of Jesus. Jesus has gone to Gethsemane with his disciples to find a place to pray. The text reads, “And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.’”

This passage can sound a little perplexing, because it can make it sound like Jesus was in opposition to the will of the Father, which isn’t really crazy if you think about it. Honestly we could hardly blame someone for not being excited about being crucified. I mean most of us don’t even like going to the dentist (except my wife who thinks of it as spring cleaning for her mouth). But I think there is another way to think about what Jesus is saying and it ties in with today’s triumphal entry. Here is my thought -- maybe Jesus is asking God the Father if just this one time people could act in accordance with their better angels. That is if the people who were chanting “Hosanna in the highest” could hold onto that thought rather than seamlessly moving into chanting “crucify.” Maybe he is asking if there was a way for people to stop sinning, for people to stop putting their own self-interest first, for people to care about others and about the will of God.

Now before I go on let me give you this caveat, which is I know that we are all tainted by sin carrying this in our DNA and so the idea of us stopping our sin through our own will is not possible, but as I said we are doing alternative history today. It’s a day where Abe Lincoln can kill vampires and the Detroit Lions can win the Super Bowl. So we also get to pretend that we are better than we actually are. And so we get to ask what would happen if the crowds sustained the posture they had today instead of turning into the crowd that yelled crucify a few days later? How would the world look if everyone decided to love one another in the way that God calls us to love one another?

If I was better at this online YouTube stuff this would be a good moment for me to go blurry and for a bucolic scene to emerge of people with flowers in their hair holding hands and dancing in a circle. But I’m not that good at YouTube so you still have to look at me. But is the scene I just described what a perfect world would look like, does it look like Woodstock with better hygiene and fewer hallucinogens? Well I think it is probably better than that – I mean there will at least be no performances by Sha Na Na. But enough with bucolic imagery, let me give you the way in which I think it would work. C.S Lewis once talked about how the problem with this world is not that we don’t agree on what proper behavior looks like, the problem is all the exemptions we give ourselves to acting properly. I mean I never wake up in the morning and think I am going to put a few other gods before the Lord our God. But as the day goes on and various issues emerge I find I am quite comfortable giving all sorts of things priority over God. And for every one for those situations, I have a reason --- it was an emergency, the guy in front of me was driving like an idiot or I lost track of time. And that I think this is the same way that the crowds go from chanting, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” to chanting “Crucify.” They realized that the Romans would not be very happy if things got out of hand so it would be better to shut this down right now. The god of order got prioritized over the creator and sustainer of the universe. But if we took proper behavior and obedience to God as our first priority we would live in a world without rationalizations, a world where we would not justify our wrong behavior in an attempt to make it look right.

I have been doing more reading these days because, well you know. Anyway I just finished *The Count of Monte Cristo*. There is a scene in which a young man challenges the Count to a duel. The Count accepts and they set the time for morning of the next day. That night before this duel the mother of the young man comes to the Count and begs him to spare her sons life. He agrees but tells her that the only way this can be done is for he himself to be killed in the duel. The next morning the young man arrives and asks to speak to the Count. He apologizes and says “I was guilty of a rash act, but have now made reparation for my fault. I trust the world will not look upon me as a coward because I have fulfilled the dictates of my conscience.” With this apology the duel is called off and everyone lives. This scene reminds me of the “what ifs” of today. In the eyes of a world, which esteems itself more than what is right there is only one way for a duel to be settled. One person would have to die. But here it ended differently, because someone was willing to admit wrong and both lived.

We know how things will turn out on Friday, someone has to die because the world was not willing to change. It was not willing to do the right thing and take whatever consequences. But in our world of alternative history, today it might be good for a moment to think of a world where the crowd’s repented of yelling crucify or better yet a crowd that never moved from shouting Hosanna in the highest to shouting crucify. It would be nice if for once we took the better path, the path that looks to God in all things this day and forevermore.