

You're probably familiar with the concept of "collateral damage." It usually refers to the unintended damage caused by police or military action. The army needs to destroy a military target and a nearby house gets taken out too. There was the 2002 action movie *Collateral Damage*. I didn't see it, but I assume there was plenty of collateral damage done.

Seeing lots of things get blown up in action movies can be fun. It makes the threat seem all the more menacing. But I've let my mind wander sometimes about all the real work it takes to clean up collateral damage. You may have to move out of your house or rent a car. Cherished possessions may be lost or destroyed. There's insurance agents to deal with. Possibly there will be long and drawn out law suits.

I'm reminded of the letters I've seen that were written by Samuel Schmucker, President of Gettysburg Seminary, to Abraham Lincoln complaining about the damage to the school after the Battle of Gettysburg in the Civil War. Schmucker wasn't too upset that the school's buildings had received damage from small arms fire and artillery. On the whole that damage wasn't all that bad. He was upset that after the battle the army hastily

buried people all over the school's property and then withdrew leaving the buildings filled with dead and dying soldiers. As far as I know Lincoln never replied. He had bigger things to worry about. The fact is though, a lot of innocent people were literally left with a bloody smelly mess. Wars and armies and violent police actions usually leave more than just the combatants hurting.

There's a curious little detail in our gospel reading about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. You know the story well. After what feels like a long time of traveling Jesus finally arrives at Jerusalem. He makes the final leg of the journey on a borrowed colt. Bystanders and many who recognized him as the 'charismatic rabbi from Nazareth come to Jerusalem for Passover' greet him and spread leafy branches and cloaks on the road ahead of him. All of this appears to happen in order to fulfill prophecies made by the prophet Zechariah.

The curious little detail is verse 3 of our gospel reading. Jesus sends two disciples ahead to get the colt and they are instructed to say, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." Now the people of the time were used to having their private property requisitioned. Roman soldiers often simply took what they needed -or wanted- whenever they needed

it. But the Roman soldiers weren't known for returning things. In the case of a colt they'd either abandon it, kill it, or sell it. But they did not send it back to the owner with a pleasant little thank you note attached.

The Bible doesn't actually say it, but it is safe to assume that Jesus did return the colt. Consider the entirety of the arrest, crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. You're invited to read what happens day by day this week. The great acts whereby the entire world is saved occurs with almost no collateral damage! No accomplishment so enormous has ever been done with so little harm. All of the harm - or almost all of it - happens to Jesus and Jesus alone.

God acts and the collateral damage is minimal. There is some, I must admit. I won't tell you what. I'll leave it as a teaser. So tomorrow read Mark 11:12-19 and on Tuesday read Mark 11:20 and following and you'll see a couple very purposeful damaging things God does, but that's it. You'll discover that damage is symbolically meaningful.

When God acts to take out the bad guys innocent bystanders don't get hurt. If anyone gets hurt it is God who takes the hurt upon God's own self.

I like the law of physics that says, "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." I find that to be true in my own life all the time. Even when I want to do something good I find that there is an unintended negative consequence somewhere down the road.

Here's an example. These days organic foods are all the rage. Wegmans will gladly provide customers with certified organic produce - for a higher price. People feel good about themselves because they think they are somehow being healthier or more environmentally friendly. I like the article Cornell recently published in *Small Farm Quarterly*. It said that it's not so simple. So what if someone doesn't use chemicals to control the weeds in their crops - they still have to use pesticides; just a different form. The article went on to explain that using cultivators is still a pesticide. Even something so simple and innocent as a man pulling weeds with a hoe is still a pesticide - a means of getting rid of a pest. And it has damaging environmental consequences - call it collateral damage if you want. The Cornell article concluded that there are no good answers. All food production is environmentally damaging. If you're environmentally minded you

need to look for the least-worst option - which may be organic, or may be conventional, or may be genetically modified.

God and God alone seems to be able to bring about good without bad accompanying it. Or, perhaps bad does accompany but God chooses to bring the bad upon himself. I suppose that's just part of God's grace.

As God acts to guide this world know that you will not be collateral damage. With the same fairness, dignity, and honor that the owner of the colt received from Jesus so will God treat us. And because of that may we too proclaim with the crowds, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" Amen