Rarely do I give a full-throated endorsement to television programs, but if you are not watching *Call the Midwife*, you are missing out.

Maybe because in a wash of reality television that looks less and less like any reality I’m familiar with, the program has plot and character and the outcomes seem to matter, whatever the reason, I won’t miss it.

Some are nodding, but for those who aren’t familiar with it, *Call the Midwife* is the television adaptation of Jennifer Worth’s book, *The Midwife, A Memoir of Birth, Joy and Hard Times*, and it follows the story of the nuns and midwives of Nonnatus House in London’s east end in the 1950’s.

The stories are tenderly told and, this is the magic, they are the stories of things that matter.

Each episode begins and ends with the narrator sharing some thought that captures the profundity of the moment.

Last Sunday night, she said, “There are no classes on how to go deep. That is what you learn in the last hour.”

That is the story of the last week of Jesus’s life.

It is the story of things that matter.

Through the pages of the New Testament we encounter the story of Jesus in four ways, the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Each has something that he wants to teach us about Jesus.

John’s is unique witness among the Gospels. In John, Jesus’s ministry lasts three years and he comes and goes freely from Jerusalem.
But in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the story is different.

In these three, Jesus will go to Jerusalem only one time.

And it is a trip that will matter.

Throughout Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus ministers all over the countryside. He delivers sermons in synagogues and heals people by touching them with his hands. He stands on the mountaintop and teaches the people about who God is and who God believes we can be.

And then he lives what he teaches – he associates with prostitutes and crooked businessmen giving them grace, he associates with lepers and other suspect untouchables, and with his touch, bringing them in. Then he crosses the sea of Galilee from the safe side where he and his disciples were surrounded by all that they knew, a clean, understandable Jewish world, with proper procedures and protocols and a community that knew God – he crosses to the other side where they don’t know God, and do things the wrong ways – where the ways of life are morally derelict.

He does the things that matter.

That is the progression of the Gospel story – it is Jesus getting at the things that matter.

And as the Gospel reaches its pivot point, it is time to go deep.

Jesus turns toward Jerusalem. It is not an easy turn. Jesus knows – at least he must suspect – what will happen in Jerusalem. He keeps telling his disciples what is going to happen to the son of man.

The trip down the Jerusalem road is the call to go deep. It is to take these things that matter all the way to the temple, to the dwelling place of God on earth.
Jesus’s trip to Jerusalem, just like his trip to the other side of the sea, is trip undertaken because it matters.

It’s so easy sometimes to read the bible stories and not find ourselves in them. It’s an ancient world. Sometimes the sentence structures are awkward. The practices are peculiar in places.

Sometimes we don’t want to find ourselves in the bible stories. Sometimes the bible stories have been used to hurt us. Or sometimes the bible stories promise a healing we haven’t seen.

Or maybe when everybody else seems to be getting it, when every one else’s faith seems so strong and so resolute and you’re barely hanging on by the fingernails, struggling to find yourself in the church or the bible story, it just seems all the more lonely.

But you’re in this story.

You’re in this story because you’ve been down the Jerusalem road. You’ve waved the palms and hear the hosannas.

I know that because I’ve been down that road.

I know that because I’ve gotten some updates from friends the last few weeks that told me that they’ve been down that Jerusalem road, and maybe some of you have had the same experiences.

One friend wrote me, “Well, we’re going to be moving again. It turns out that the house we’ve been renting for the last four months is in foreclosure. It was either move again already or find ourselves padlocked out of our home when we got home from work one day. It turns out that the rent we’ve been paying was only enough to cover the landlord’s credit card bills, so he hasn’t paid the mortgage in six months.”
Another friend wrote, “There’s not really a good way to say this, so I’ll just come straight out with it, I’ve been diagnosed with breast cancer and chemo starts next week. I know that it will affect my work so I wanted to go ahead and make sure everyone knew it.”

We’ve all been down that Jerusalem road. Or we know someone who has. Or we know that our turn will come. Whatever the Jerusalem road is, it will be the call to go deep.

My friend Simeon Spencer has served the Union Baptist Church in Trenton, New Jersey, since we were in seminary together. He wrote this a couple of weeks ago:

“So, one of my wife's co-workers--mother and wife in a young family. Oldest child is 3 and the youngest is a few months old.

They had one of the "nice" refurbished row homes on, (ironically you will see) MLK Avenue.

A couple of weeks ago there was a shooting a few blocks down at an illegal "house club."

Shootings on that street are commonplace. The next morning, as people were standing around at the site, someone opened fire into the crowd. This is less than 24hrs later. Two hit, one dead on the spot and one lingered but died yesterday.

Anyway, for a while this young mother was explaining the gun shots to the three year old as "fireworks" going off. It was easier when the sounds were coming from the back side of the house where there weren't many windows. When the sounds became more frequent in the front of the house, and her little boy started saying, "Mommy, I want to see the fireworks! " while she is moving them farther away from the windows, she was running out of explanations.

One morning on their way out, there was a gun on the sidewalk in front of the house.
A couple of weeks ago, she got a call from her son's daycare to come get him. The problem? He was crying and inconsolable. Why? He said he was afraid. The explanations had run out. "Are we going to get shot?"

She picked him up, went straight to her husband’s office and said, "We are moving."

In a little better than a week, they were gone.”

He concluded,

“1.) I don't blame her.
2.) My heart breaks for those with no options but to stay.”

It’s that Jerusalem road again.

It starts off “Hosanna,” and it ends with the explanations running out.

It ends with the explanations running out – I cannot tell you how many times in fifteen years of ministry, I have heard the words, “Why can’t God just do something about it?”

If you’ve ever wondered that, there’s a place for you in this story.

Do you know what *hosanna* means?

It’s a cry of joy. It doesn’t really translate very well into English. It’s just joy.

And Jesus is greeted with joy when he gets to the edges of Jerusalem.

Why is it joy?

The gospel writers disagree as to why. Luke leaves out the *hosannas* completely. He goes straight to “blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.”

Mark throws in the *hosannas* but he doesn’t do much with them.

Mathew, though, gives the crowd more to say, they say, “Hosanna to the Son of David.”

In the Old Testament, God makes a promise. God promises that King David’s heir will forever be the king in Jerusalem.
But the people living in Jerusalem know that there is no heir to King David living in Jerusalem, and he certainly isn’t the ruler. The explanations have run out. But then comes Jesus – and once more, God is trustworthy. “Hosanna,” they say, “Hosanna to the son of David.” And with that, a whole set of expectations swings into place. There are expectations of what will happen next. The joy is based on the hope of radical change. King David ruled in might, and King Jesus must do the same. Everything will be made right, right away. Explanations will be forthcoming. Wherever we are on the Jerusalem road it’ll all just go away, everything will be right. King Jesus is here. He will bring down holy vengeance on the oppressor and the power of his might will shake down the mighty. That’s what the hosannas anticipate. But that is not what happened. That is not the sort of king Jesus is. No, that’s not what happened at all. God kept the promise, but it didn’t look the way anyone expected it to. It is really more satisfying when there’s a different outcome, isn’t there? It’s really more satisfying when the enemies are decimated. Forget going deep, just give us decimation when it’s needed. Maybe you remember The West Wing. I never saw it in the first run, I was too busy in my job to watch television then, but now, though the wonders of Netflix, I’ve discovered that each episode is just the right length to keep me on the treadmill for the right amount of time. In the second episode we are
introduced to Captain Morris, the visiting White House physician who has come to take
the president’s blood pressure and lecture him about laying off the red meat, dairy and
scotch, and as soon as we meet him, the president asks for him to be reassigned
permanently to the White House. They have established a rapport and the president jokes
with him about his baby daughter and wife, and the physician jokes with the president
about his bad jokes.

Soon, though, the camera pans to the president being woken in the middle of the night. A
military transport plane on its way to a teaching hospital in Oman has been shot down
with a shoulder-fired missile and Captain Morris was on board. The military analyzes the
trajectory pattern of the missile and determines that it was fired from the roof of the
military headquarters of the enemy territory.

As the president and his chief-of-staff are waiting on a briefing, the president turns and
says to him,

“Leo, I am going to unleash holy hell on those people.”

We know what is going to happen at the end of the Jerusalem road.

We know that Jesus will “go deep,” but it will end with a cross. The people who want
Jesus to unleash holy hell on their oppressors will turn, and the turn will be swift.

The explanations will run out.

And we may even ourselves wonder why God doesn’t unleash a torrent of power to stop
the train-wreck, we may wonder why vengeance isn’t the order of the day.

But that isn’t the way the story goes.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.