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Palm Sunday
Matthew 21:1-9
March 28th, 2010

What part of the crowd would you have been on that faithful triumphant day? Before we clarify that question and attempt to answer, a bit more information might be useful.

The people of God were gathered in Jerusalem for this “most important” Passover festival. The Jews would come from the ends of the earth to Jerusalem. Wherever one might live, it was his obligation to observe at least one Passover in the Holy City. To this day, when Jews in foreign lands observe the Passover, they say: “This year here; next year in Jerusalem.” Like New Orleans during Marti Gras, Strugis (S.D) or Daytona (FL) during bike week or Augusta (GA) during The Masters, Jerusalem and the villages round about were so very crowded.

With the great crowd also came the news. This Jesus of Nazareth was there. He has fed the hungry, given sight to the blind and raised the dead. This was the kind of guy the people wanted to see. This was rumored to be the great deliverer, the conqueror for the sake of the people of God. And now the crowd would gather. A great crowd was there to see Jesus. What part of the crowd would you have been on that faithful triumphant day?

There were two crowds. There was the crowd which was accompanying Jesus from Bethany, and there was the crowd which surged out from Jerusalem to see Him. It must have been a sight to behold as these two crowds would come together like a surging sea. I’m not asking which crowd you would have been a part of. Rather, I would like to know what *part* of the crowd you would have been on that faithful triumphant day.

You see, there were those who desired to come out and “sightsee.” Here was a man who has, as rumor had it, fed the hungry, healed the sick and raised people from the dead. Many in this crowd wanted simply to see what all the fuss was about – wanted to see a sensational figure. It’s always possible to attract people for a time by accomplishing something amazing and out of this world. But the spotlight does not remain on the person for long. Those in that crowd looking to see a sensation were within days shouting for his death.

Now there were also many in this crowd who were greeting Jesus as a great conqueror. They were the ones who followed him from one place to the next. They were gathered for the very reason that this was the predominant atmosphere of the whole scene. This would be the man who would lead the people of God into victory over their enemies. This was the man who would give success and make them into a great nation – powerful and feared. They were the ones who greeted Jesus with the words, “*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.*” The word, “Hosanna” means, “Save now!” And the shout of the people was almost precisely the shout: “God save the King!”

This was not an impromptu cry. They were quoting Psalm 118: 25, 26 which many of them knew by heart from their youth. This was the battle cry of the coming King, the deliverer, the conquering messiah for a people. You see, they weren’t just pulling these words out of thin air. They had rehearsed them for this moment – and now the moment has come. “*Save us,*” they said. “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,*” are the very words from this ancient Psalm. There was no doubt that those who were shouting knew about Lazarus being raised from the dead just days earlier. There is no doubt those shouting knew of what Jesus has done and were perhaps convinced that this man was going to change things for the people of God and grant them victory over their enemies.

Here is the question posed again to you, the people of God gathered in this place on Palm Sunday: what part of the crowd would you have been on that faithful triumphant day? Would you have been a “sightseer” or a “greeter” for the conqueror? My question does not ask if you would have been following Jesus from Bethany to Jerusalem for the Passover or if you were already there. I don’t

really care “which” crowd you would have been a part of. I’m concerned, rather, of what “part” of the crowd now gathered around Jesus you would call yourself a part of.

I know, I’m asking a difficult question that you can’t really answer because you were not there. But what if I put you in this situation today? Then, what part? Would you just be there to see what the “hubbub” was all about? Or, would you be there shouting Hosannas? Be honest. And I want you to realize that for the most part, neither crowd had it right.

Now, I can’t speak for you personally but I can imagine that any of us might be a little of both. In this celebrity adorning world many would like to just get a glimpse of a well known miracle worker or self proclaimed prophet. We say, “Perhaps I could get His autograph or see a miracle for myself. Then I can tell others that I am among a select few who experienced such amazement.” I’m sure, if they had them, paparazzi would follow Him wherever He went – trying to get a picture for the local tabloid. Maybe they would try to catch Him in a scandalous act.

Honestly I think we approach Jesus like this at times. We want to see what this Jesus will do – especially when we are confronted with a particular need. We want to witness for ourselves the things this amazing man can do. We are more interested in seeing fantastic things and hope for a miracle than to call Him our Comforter and Savior in the right respect. We are more interested in what He can do for us, what he can show to amaze us, what Jesus can do to put food in our mouth or to cure what ails us. But this King is so much more than that.

And, if we are honest, there is a part of us that shouts “Hosannas” like that other part of the crowd – and yet for the wrong reasons. Jesus came to save the lost and not to give us victory with the sword. He came to change our lives by giving us the promise of eternal life – not to make the United State a “superpower” among the world’s nations. Many in the day of Jesus thought He came for that very purpose. They were wrong. Jesus plainly said, “*My Kingdom is not of this world.*” He came to save the lost and to give new life in the life to come. Have we missed that part of life? This life is preparation for the life to come. This life is given to service of our neighbor and to Christ who serves us each day. Our “Hosannas” are for Christ who saves to life to come – not for victory in life right now.

Which part of the crowd? You and I are a part of both. We have our good intentions and we have our selfish desires. But Jesus came for the right reasons – even when our good intentions and our selfish desires are put before Him. The cry of Psalm 118 of the people of God may have been spoken for the wrong reason – but Jesus came for the right reason. And this is where He meets you.

Never-the-less Jesus would enter Jerusalem regardless of the shouts from the crowd. He knew they didn’t really understand. He knew why they said what they said and he knew why the others were pushing forward on the crowd to see the newest celebrity. He knew they had it all wrong. But Jesus would make it all right. Jesus knew what He was doing even when they didn’t know what they were doing. He knows how to handle the changes and chances of this life, even when we think we know for ourselves – but really don’t. He knew what was ahead of him – a different crowd that wouldn’t shout Hosannas but rather “crucify Him” in just a couple of days. Jesus knew – and He knows for you today as well.

Beloved, know this – you are a part of the crowd shouting “Hosanna.” And then you are a part of that next crowd that says, “Crucify Him.” That’s because of your sin. But Jesus knows how to listen to you and He does listen. He hears you when you said both. He knows what you need and that is why He continued to press on with the plan of salvation that would take Him to the cross where He would bleed to death for you.

“Hosanna” – Jesus Saves. “Crucify Him” – He deserves death. Now, which of those two crowds are you in? That’s right – you are in both. Praise be to God that He knows where to find you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.