

Sermon March 24, 2024

Welcome to the Palm Parade

I love parades. I love big parades with floats and marching bands. And I love little parades. My godparents moved to a small town in Virginia, right on the Bay, a few years before Meg was born. Every year they have a 4th of July parade....

I think of that parade when I think of this week's palm parade. You can almost feel the excitement in the air. Those crowds of people that have followed Jesus for months have followed him to the gates of Jerusalem. As they got closer to the city, their numbers were absorbed by the even bigger crowds of pilgrims who had come for the annual Passover celebration. Every year, the city streets overflowed with people who had come from far and wide – some to visit the Holy Temple... others looking for a good time. And no matter why they came, there is one thing you can be sure of: once again there was no room at the inn.

I wonder how many had heard the rumors about this man named Jesus? The one who could bring sight to the blind or heal the lame. How many had heard the stories of his friend Lazarus, who he had brought back to life just days ago?

"Could he be the one?" they wondered. The one they had been waiting for... the king who would rule in the tradition of David and Solomon. The one who would vanquish the Roman army forever and set the people free!

And so, this man who was born in a borrowed stable and laid in a borrowed manger, now rode into town on a borrowed donkey. It doesn't sound like a very promising beginning for a kingdom but the people didn't care. The word spread that the chosen one was entering the city gates and the people ran to greet him. Those crowds gathering in Jerusalem, standing on tip-toes and straining their eyes up the road toward the city gate to catch their first glimpse of Jesus and his followers on the way, were waiting to be amazed. They wanted a miracle. They threw their coats on the ground, they broke off palm branches and waved them with joy. They cried out:

Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!

Save us! Save us! Save us!

The cries grew louder and louder. The crowds grew bigger and bigger.

Jesus, save us from poverty! Jesus, save us from Rome! Jesus, save us from oppression! Jesus, save us from ourselves!

Jesus, Save us!

Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!

“Blessed is the One who comes in the name of God!”

It doesn't take long for those crowds to turn away. To drop their palm branches in the road and look for the next amazing event. It was the same crowds that gathered days later to decide which prisoner should be set free. The cries of Hosannas turn into calls to free Barabbas; Blessed is the One who comes in the name of God turn into

Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!

Perhaps it is because they were so caught up in the pageantry of their expectations that they never paid attention to who Jesus really was.

Jesus didn't come to Jerusalem to conquer the Roman Empire. He never claimed to be the King of the Jews – that was a label that was forced on him by his accusers. He didn't want the pomp and circumstance. That was an expectation that was pushed onto him by the crowds.

“Just give us what we want. Just make our lives better. Just show us a miracle. And then we'll believe.”

It is easy to judge the crowds on that first Palm Sunday. But are they really so much different than you and me?

When we're honest, we all want something from Jesus. Healing for us or a family member or a friend. Solutions to our financial issues. Restoration of our relationships. Power, success.

And we would love to see a miracle – right here and right now. Right before our eyes.

But that's not why Jesus came to Jerusalem. He didn't come to perform wonderful miracles in the town square or show the Roman Empire whose God is more powerful.

Jesus came to Jerusalem for one thing . . . to die.

Actually, if you think about it - Jesus gave the people in Jerusalem exactly what they asked for.

All those people who wanted something for themselves got it. They shouted, "Hosanna" – "Save us!" And that is just what he did... just not what they expected. They got forgiveness. They got new life. They got salvation.

Those who wanted a new kingdom got that, too. Jesus established a new kind of kingdom: one based on love not hate, on inclusion and extravagant welcome

And those who wanted to be amazed – those who were looking for a miracle. They definitely got that! Just not in the way they expected it! Not during the palm parade... not on the cross... but in the empty tomb!

Maybe it doesn't matter that the people turned away from Jesus and looked for salvation in the wrong places. Maybe it doesn't matter that their denials and betrayals brought Jesus closer to the cross. Maybe it doesn't matter, because Jesus knew that the cross was his final destination.

On the Cross, Jesus said, "It is FINISHED." God was revealed more clearly on earth than God ever had been . . . or ever would be . . . revealed.

So maybe lots of people in Jerusalem turned out for the Palm Parade for the wrong reasons. So maybe WE turn to Jesus for the wrong reasons.

It doesn't matter

Jesus died for those people who gathered together, shouting "Hosanna," Jesus gathered for the ones who turned on him and cried "Crucify him!" too.

The Cross reminds us of our flaws and our failures. The Empty Tomb tells us that the cross is never the end of the story. Death and horror and cruelty and terror are never the end of the story. The Light shining from the tomb is God's answer to our cries of "Hosanna!" "Save us!"

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of God. Amen