

## The Odd Parade

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Crossroads Christian Church

Luke 19:29-40

March 24, 2013 Palm Sunday C

There were no floats. The Clydesdales didn't come out through the wagon gate, pulling the beer wagon around the field perimeter, and it wasn't followed by pickup trucks carrying the players and coaches. There was no marching band, no drum majors, no cheerleaders. No beauty queens sat perched on the backs of convertibles, so their tiaras didn't glisten in the sunlight. There were no giant helium balloons of cartoon characters hovering over the parade route. Nobody threw beads into the crowd. No television commentators made comment on the passing spectacle.

Some would say that it wasn't much of a parade by our standards. They had a crowd—a large crowd, some of the Gospels say. They were probably a mixed crowd. There were the true believers, who knew and loved Jesus. There were the hopeful, wondering if Jesus would meet their expectations of the Messiah. There were the curiosity seekers, who had heard something of Jesus' reputation, and wanted to see if he could really do some of the amazing things attributed to them. It was less of a parade, maybe, and more of a demonstration. Jesus and his close disciples were all that made their way down the road that day.

Yet that odd parade was memorable. Still, today, on Palm Sunday, we celebrate Jesus entering Jerusalem. Jesus and the disciples knew perfectly well that this wasn't just another stroll into town to go visit the market, or even to go worship at the Temple. There was all the anticipation and excitement of the holiday, with vast numbers of people pouring into town to celebrate. There was the tension that existed with the Roman occupation, with squadrons of soldiers there to suppress any possible uprising or incident. And there was, most of all, the anticipation of what would happen when Jesus came to town on this particular Passover. John's gospel records that people were asking, "What do you think? Surely he won't come to the festival, will he?" And he tells of the chief priests saying, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation!" And Caiaphas, the high priest, had responded, with chilling irony, "It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." The popularity and power of Jesus was great enough that it sent a cold chill up the backs of the Romans and the city leaders. They were already

setting up contingency plans. How do we get this troublemaker out of the way with the least possible fuss?

Jesus came into town knowing what to expect. He knew that many people saw him as having the potential to lead a revolution, to spark a rebellion, and that they were ready to follow him. He knew of the opposition of the political and religious leaders. For good or for bad, he would be a focus of attention. The gospels show us that Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem was carefully planned and orchestrated. It didn't just happen. Jesus wanted people to know just who he was and what he was doing. He was the Messiah. He had come to save the people. But he wasn't going to save them by leading a rebellion. He was coming as the Prince of Peace. He rode a donkey. The custom was that a conquering king would enter a city on a warhorse. A king who came in peace would ride on a donkey. "Hosanna!" the crowds cried, as they waved their palm branches in tribute. It was a cry one would make to God. It meant "O save us!" They shouted "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" That phrase came from Psalm 118:26, and had been used in festival processions of kings and princes and priests—it was at once a political and a theological claim about Jesus. So much enthusiasm! So much hope! So many expectations! And so Jesus came, the center of attention, into the city which would later capture him, torture him, kill him, and cast him aside—but also the city which would witness his glorious resurrection. So he entered Jerusalem, and said just what he needed to say. I am not a conquering hero like David; I am a Prince of Peace. I didn't come to save you *from* the Romans; I have come to save you *for* God.

In the story of the triumphal entry, we have hints of the cross. The story begins at the Mount of Olives. On Thursday night, that is where Jesus and the disciples will go after the Passover supper to pray, and there he will be arrested. Crowds will cry Hosanna, save us! And later, on Friday, crowds will cry crucify him! Different crowds, different people, perhaps, but still how quickly we go from acceptance to rejection. There's another irony, though. Jesus comes in as the Prince of Peace, but immediately he begins to stir up trouble, turning the tables on the money changers in the temple; harshly criticizing the religious leaders. Cries of praise will become cries of rage. His journey into the gates of the city will lead to another journey to outside the gates of the city—to the place of execution. The triumph will lead to tragedy, but the tragedy will lead to the ultimate triumph, the open tomb. Jesus made quite an entrance.

Thom Shuman wraps up this combination of triumph and tragedy in his prayer poem "Will I?"

will i lay my cloak  
before you,  
when they arrest you on olive mountain,  
or pull it tighter around me  
fading into the ranks of the deserters;

will i shout:  
'Blessed is the one who comes  
in the name of the Lord!'  
when they parade you before the authorities,  
or will i tell any one -  
and every one -  
around me  
that i never met you in my life;

will i lay my palm branches  
at your feet,  
as they march you  
to Calvary,  
or use them to put more stripes on your bloody back;

will i run behind you  
when they carry you  
to the tomb,  
or turn away  
as the ashes of my hopes  
are rubbed into my shattered heart?  
(unquote)  
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It's a disturbing question, isn't it? Will I? Will I remain faithful in tough times as well as good, or will I deny or betray Jesus? Will I only follow Jesus if he meets my expectations and my needs?

Most of the people who stood waving their palm fronds and shouting Hosanna and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" were blissfully unaware of what would happen in the terrible, awful, and yet awesome week to come. For many, it was a protest movement, a demonstration, a challenge to the Romans and the high priests that they were willing to switch allegiances to a new king.

But some, the disciples, had heard the words, words they had wanted to ignore, words that Jesus had repeated to them over and over again in hopes that they would finally sink in; that Jesus would suffer and be executed before he could rise in power. The hopes of those who

anticipated a glorious revolution would be dashed. The hearts of those who loved Jesus dearly would be broken.

We see the story of Palm Sunday from hindsight; from the perspective of people who knew what happened later in the week, at the temple, the courtyard, the upper room, the governor's palace, the hill of crucifixion, and the empty tomb. But still we pick up the palm fronds. Still we praise that humble man on a donkey. Still we cry Hosanna—O, save us! And still we remember that he rides into Jerusalem to face death, so that we might know life. Amen.

by Michael E Dixon