

Sermon; "Faces in the crowd" (*The Hosanna that Saves*)

Good morning.

A little boy was sick on Palm Sunday and stayed home from church with his mother. His father returned from church holding a palm branch.

The little boy was curious and asked, "Why do you have that palm branch, dad?"

"You see, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved Palm Branches to honor him, so we got Palm Branches today."

The little boy replied, "Aw Mannnn! The one Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!"

This morning as you all know is called Palm Sunday- The day, taken from the Gospels, where a whole city threw a parade for Jesus. As Jesus rode into the city, the people threw Palm branches in anticipation of his coming.- Thus we get the name Palm Sunday. - This day marked a time of celebration where Jesus was the worshipped and praised.

This day is Bittersweet for us because even as we read of the celebration we know that Thursday is coming, the time of the "Last Supper", the time of the betrayal of the Christ, we know that Friday is coming- The cross is coming. We know that many in this same crowd will within a few short days exchange words of praise to words of death, shouting Hosanna, Hosanna today only to shout Crucify Him, Crucify Him in just a few days more. But gladly we also know that Easter Sunday is coming, the day of resurrection. See what I mean about highs and lows.

What must it have been like to be a part of that crowd that first Palm Sunday? To stand there cheering as the Messiah made his way into the city. I figure there were most likely 3 or 4 types of people in that crowd, and we're going to briefly take a look at each one. The Roman guards, they were there to do a job, to keep the peace and ensure that the proper respect was shown to Caesar and the Roman overlords. And then there were the High Priests, who wanted to see if this guy Jesus was going to usurp their authority over the people. Another was just your average every day person who saw a crowd and got caught up in all the shouting and celebrating and sprinkling of these were probably some who thought this might be the time for rebellion against the Roman oppressors. And then there were those who knew what this really was all about.

The ones who knew the Messiah had arrived and who wanted to see and know Jesus, the savior of all mankind.

Let's look at the largest group first, those who were in town already since it was the Feast of the Passover. Imagine yourself in Jerusalem over 2000 years ago. There was a great crowd there that day that had come to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. Probably similar to what we see in Times Square on New Year's Eve.

Josephus, the notable Jewish historian, estimated that over two million people were involved in the great Passover Feast. Teeming thousands from all over the world were flooding into the city to observe the Passover.

An excitable carnival-like atmosphere was bound to prevail over such a mob of people. Lots of people jamming the streets of the city, getting ready to celebrate. But as they prepared to observe one of the most important feasts that the Jewish people celebrated all year, word came that Jesus was on his way into the city. Now I'm sure some had heard of this Messiah, this King of the Jews but still many others were probably unaware of the stories of this man. But in the spirit of a good party they saw the crowds gathering and figured they better be in on it too. To see what all the shouting was about. And I'm sure others saw the entrance into the town by this man Jesus as the start of the rebellion that they were sure was to come. The King of Kings who would lead them in their war to kick out the Romans and to bring Peace to the land. The only trouble with this last group was they didn't understand that Jesus was a man of Peace, that his Kingdom was not of this earth and he was here to teach us the Love of God and not the might of the people.

And that group of zealots was in part the reason that we saw the second group. The Roman guards who were stationed in Jerusalem to keep the peace. I'm sure they knew who this man Jesus was, his reputation as a rabble rouser who preached that the true King was God and not Caesar. I'm sure this made the guards stop and wonder of there was any way to calm down this crowd who was shouting their Hosannas to their king. I'm sure they had their eyes out to see if this celebration would become a riot and probably a few were hoping it would to give them the excuse to thin out this mob.

And then there were the Priests. John 12:19 (NIV) reads,
19 So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

Wherever the power was, that was where you'd find these Pharisees. Wherever the prestige was, you could be sure they would be there. They wanted the praise. They wanted the glory. They wanted to be looked up to and they wanted to be the ones who had all the influence. They were fine as long as they were the center of attention, but look out if someone else received the praise. People were beginning to come to Jesus and follow Him. And the Pharisees knew that this meant their powerful political positions were in jeopardy.

How tragic it is...

- that religious positions sometimes become political.
- that men reject Christ for the things of this world.
- that men swap eternity for social and political gain.

These preachers and teachers, these church leaders, were only interested in themselves. They were only interested in the prestige of their positions. And they were going to oppose anyone and anything that threatened their power.

As we saw in the video clip, I'm sure their reaction was similar, seeing the cheering crowds made them nervous and they probably wanted this Jesus to tell the crowds to calm down, to be quiet. But this entrance into the city was such that as Jesus stated that

these ones recognized Him for Who He is ... He is the Savior and worthy to be praised...they were doing the right thing by praising Him for who He was and that if they did not shout out their praise .. if humans will not do it.. then part of creation will... the stones will cry out.. in other words.. no kind of silencing or denial of Who the Lord was could stop him from being Just that.. God as a Man.. coming to die for mankind and bring man back to God's presence through Him.

And lastly there were the few that were there to see the Son of God. The King of Kings, the Messiah and Savior.

In John 12:20-21 (NIV) it reads,

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast.

21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus."

"We would like to see Jesus."

And that simple statement was the true reason that the people should have been there that day. Oh that we would all come into His presence to glorify and honor Him. What a difference it would make in our lives if we would just say, "We would like to see Jesus."

For when we see Jesus and worship His Holy Name, God is glorified. When we recognize that this Jesus represents the love that God has for us, a love that would send Him to the cross to die for us, we can be changed. When we come to the realization that God gave His only Son to die for you and for me that we might not perish but have everlasting life, it changes our perspective. When we see and believe this glorious truth; then we really begin to worship Him. We begin to bow down and surrender our whole beings to God. We begin to follow and obey His will, to honor and praise Him for all He has done and is doing for us. Yes, when we really seek Jesus, that's when the name of God is glorified. That's when real worship occurs.

Those people in the crowd that day were shouting something that was far more significant than they realized.

Hosanna, they shouted. Hosanna.

This Hebrew word means "he who saves." They were welcoming their King.

But this was not a king that would reign over Israel. No, this King was far more important, far more powerful than any king on earth.

For although they didn't realize it, they were honoring the King of heaven. They were honoring the King of kings and Lord of lords. They were honoring the King that would triumph over death. They were singing praises to the Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world.

Shouldn't we be doing the same thing today?

So Which of these people would you have been. Would you be there like the guards watching to see if a fight was brewing? Would you have been like the Priests, waiting to see if what was said agreed with your own perceptions of how the people should act? Would you have been one of the many who just saw a crowd and figured I better see what is happening, after all no one wants to miss a good party? Or would you have been like the Greeks, who just wanted to see Jesus? One who wanted to see the Savior and bask in his heavenly presence, wanted to be in the presence of the Messiah who came to save us all. After all that's what Jesus' journey was all about. The Hosanna, who saved us all and washed away our sins. Which one would you be?