

Mar 16 08 Palm Sunday Matthew 21:1-11

I LOVE A PARADE

I think most people love parades. Now days parades come with candy. We have a parade for St. Patrick Day, which they had in Springfield yesterday, where everyone becomes Irish for a one day. On Veteran's day there is a parade some place. When the state fair opens there is one. We have the Macys Christmas parade on Thanksgiving morning signaling the official beginning of the Christmas shopping season. Then there are the bowl game parades with the Rose Parade in California being the big one. Many gather and wait long hours to get a good spot. Some begin around noon on December 31 to stake out their places and cook out or bring food and blankets in order to sleep there to keep their spots.

When we were in Roanoke they had a parade every year to celebrate Memorial Day. The church sometimes had a float in it. One year we used our VBS theme for the float and I was seated on a throne as King, wearing a crown and a heavy warm robe. That was fun. But most times Carole and I would sit on the corner and watch the kids and the band and the trucks and when it was a round election times, the politicians came smiling marching down the street throwing their candy and shaking our hands. You know what all these parades had in common?

Besides the bands and stuff like that? When the parade was over the people went home the same as when they came, maybe a little more entertained, but in reality nothing else changed.

This morning we see another parade of sorts. Only it consisted of 12 guys, a donkey or two, and another man. People lined the street to see him. This man had become famous for the things he had been doing. Though he wanted to remain in the background the things that happened when he was around always drew a crowd. Why, one time there were 5,000 men, plus women and children. This turned into a miracle because when he finished speaking it was late so he fed them. He took what they had, a couple of fish and the loaves of bread, blessed them, and told his disciples to pass them out until all were fed. Much to the amazement of the disciples and the 5,000 plus people, all were fed and there were 12 baskets left over. This caused more people to follow him. But that was the problem. They were following from afar, meaning, not too closely, because they were in it for what they could get, rather than committing to him and his message of love, hope, peace and forgiveness. At one time he stopped the crowd and told them they had to make a choice. If they were going to follow him, they were going to have to come into his inner circle and commit to his way of life. They were going to have to pick up their

crosses and follow him, not just when they wanted to, but every day. Some remained with him on the road, but some decided the road would be too tough and turned back.

This man they were following was unique. He went at it with the religious leaders. He mingled with the less fortunate. They even tested him by bringing a harlot to him to be stoned as a test case; he put the men who had gathered on the spot. He said, “You without sin, cast the first stone.” Well, you could have heard a pin drop. The next thing you know, instead of flinging their stones at the girl as punishment, they dropped them to the ground and they murmured “Who does he think he is?” as they went their way. The young girl, still shaking, just stayed close until he asked what happened to her accusers. When she said they had gone, he told her to go and sin no more. WOW! Her life was changed that day. She became one of his followers. Some think it could have been Mary Magdalene.

Then there was the time he was going on his way and a Roman official stopped him and asked if he would come and touch his daughter who was terribly sick and close to death. On the way a crowd gathered around and in that crowd was a woman who had a bleeding problem for most of her life. She tried all avenues to get this under control but no amount of medicine, or doctors could seem to help. She was left out of family things because

with this bleeding problem she would be considered unclean. So she heard about this man who was coming to her area that touched others so she thought if she could just touch him, maybe, just maybe things would change in her life. When she saw the crowd she thought it was useless. She thought she could never get close enough. But she did not give up. She followed the crowd going to the Roman official's house and at just the right moment when the man's robe seemed to come up behind him, she reached out and touched the very end of it with the very tip of her finger and immediately the bleeding stopped. And so did the man, much to the surprise of everyone around him. "Who touched me?" he asked. Well, with so many around his disciples said there could have been numerous people who touched him. But the man said "No! When that person touched me something happened. I felt some power leave me and enter that person. Someone touched me and is changed. Who is it?" And being afraid, the woman fell on her knees as the crowd began to draw away from him so that he could see who touched him. He looked at her and said, "Woman your faith has healed you, go, you are healed and salvation has been given to you." And just about that time the servants of the Roman official came to say there was no need to bring his friend because his daughter had died. The Roman official looked with frustration at the man and thought if perhaps they had not taken time for this woman his daughter would still is alive. The man looked him right in his eyes and said,

“My friend, do you believe that I can do great things.” “Yes, I believe you can.” “Then just trust in me. Let’s continue on to your home.” When they get there sure enough there is weeping for the little girl had died. The man told the Roman official just to trust as they went upstairs to where the girl was lying. After a prayer and a few more minutes, the man called the girl to get up and immediately she did, much to the happiness of the Roman official and his family.

That’s the kind of guy some of these people were following. His crowd was getting larger and larger. And the more miracles that happened, the more people would join his parade. It was tough for him to find a place to go where he could be alone. At least once he had his disciples get a couple of boats so they could get away from the crowds and go to the other side. While out on the boat a fierce storm arose and they almost drowned. While the disciples worked hard to keep the boat afloat this man was so exhausted he slept. When they woke him to tell them of their fears, he got up and spoke to the wind and the rain and they stopped, and the next thing they knew they were on the other side of the lake. The disciples were in shock, oh, not from the storm, but thinking to themselves, “Who is this man? He can do everything. He speaks to the wind and the rain and they stop. Who is this man who has control of nature? Who is this man we are following?”

And then one last picture of this man. Some of you heard the story last week. It was when this man went to the home of his friend 4 days after his death. When he arrived there were many mourners who came to grieve with the family. When they got to Lazarus' home Martha came running out saying, "Oh master, if you had been here my brother would not have died." And the master said, "Martha, continue to believe in me. For those who believe in me will never die. Never forget this." And then the other sister came to greet them with tears in her eyes. It was then that this man's emotion for his friend was felt for he wept. Then they went to the tomb and there amongst a large crowd he lifted his hands in prayer and with that he told them to remove the stone and let his friend out. They did and he called for Lazarus to come forth and in just a few seconds out he comes alive.

Many, as Scripture states, who saw this were amazed. Some looked at the living Lazarus and then at the man who called him forth, and they believed. Even the religious leaders who had been following the man in order to trip him up or find enough evidence to bring him to trial were astonished. In fact, some believed. And then others ran to tell the high ranking religious officials what just happened. These men, the ones who made the laws for the Jews, and suppose to know the Scriptures decided, "This guy is getting too much of a following and Rome is

going to get all over us. Something must be done with him. He just needs to be out of the picture. He needs to die.”

It is now Sunday and people were coming early to prepare to celebrate for the Passover. People from all over the area made this pilgrimage to Jerusalem every year as required by their Law. This was one of the highlights of their faith. It was the time when all God’s people gathered with family and friends and remembered their salvation from the Egyptians. They remembered how the death angel had passed over every home of their ancestors that had blood smeared on their doorposts. They remember how their ancestors were to be ready at a moments notice to leave that place and head for the Promise Land. Moses had been instructed by God to remind the people to celebrate this feast every year together as a community. So many came to Jerusalem each year, so there could be 10,000 or 30,000 extra people during that week. So there were many who might have heard some of the stories of this man from Nazareth who touched so many people.

When this man was ready to enter into Jerusalem to begin the week long celebration, he sent a few of his men to get a donkey to ride on. It wasn’t as if he was tired. He was making a statement. And many people heard that he was coming and they began to line up along the parade route to say hi to him and his disciples. Some of

them cut palms from the palm trees and began waving them at him. Others took off their cloaks placing them on the ground in front of him. They shouted at him and sang hymns of praise as they welcomed him as if he was their king into Jerusalem. They yelled, “O the King is coming, the King is coming, I just heard the trumpets sounding, and now his face I see. The King is coming, the king is coming! Praise God he’s coming for me.” That’s a more contemporary greeting. What they shouted was “Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” And as the crowds voices began to increase they shouted all the more their praises. And the crowd joined in and sang with enthusiasm as they waved their palms and reached out to touch and follow Jesus into the city.

And while all this was happening the religious leaders, the biggies, the high priest and his court, stood at the entrance to the city with their arms folded thinking of ways to get rid of this pest.

Here now the story as found in Matthew 21:1-11

READ

Oh how we love to hear this story. At least I do. We always celebrate Palm Sunday by giving out palms and little kids lead us waving the palms and singing. Today our own kids led our own Jesus, Bart, and one of his disciples, Todd, into the church as we sang and waved our palms. It is a time of celebration. We all want to join

in. It's fun. After all these weeks of talking about the life of Jesus and sin we get down to his final week on this earth and here he is making one last statement. Some commentators say that Jesus' action was making a statement to the people and to the religious leaders. He was coming in such a way no one would miss the meaning. He came in dramatic form, much like Jeremiah did. But would they listen? NO! Remember how Jeremiah put a yoke around his neck telling them if they didn't listen to God they would be yoked elsewhere and God would let it happen? He was showing them that slavery was in their future if they did not repent and turn to God.

Jesus' coming into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey was a sign that the promised Messiah had come from God. Jesus was coming to the people not as a miracle worker, nor a king, nor an army warrior. He was coming humbly as God's messenger. He was coming to Jerusalem one last time with a message of hope and repentance. He was coming to show the people the love of his Father in heaven. He was coming as a reminder of what this Passover week was all about. Never mind just preparing for the meal, but they needed also to prepare their hearts to remember the great sacrifices that had happened in order for them to be free. He came, as John the Baptist had said, as "the Lamb that would take away the sins of the world."

Today we are called to remember this as well. We are part of the crowd that heard the story, for you see, we hear the stories of Jesus often. We hear about his healings, his feeding the 5,000, making the lame walk again, driving out demons and all that. But do we think they are just stories to get our interest? Or do we believe these are things that Jesus did to show us his love and his power so we would follow him? At the end of John's gospel we read words that say Jesus did so many more and wonderful miracles that were not written in the Scriptures. But these were written so that those who would read and believe could find salvation.

I'm sure many of the people who had gathered there along that parade route had never followed Jesus for long. But Jesus was now coming to the end of his life and his followers were going to have to make a decision. Is he truly the Messiah? And if he is, are they willing to follow him all the way? Are they willing to follow him all the way to the cross?

My friends that is the same question for us today. And let me remind you some of these same people who lined the street in celebration were the same ones who on Friday stood with others at the palace and shouted for Jesus to be crucified and Barabbas to be set free.

Our devotion this morning gives us an invitation to follow Jesus when it says, “As Jesus passes us today, and he turns and looks you and me in the eye and says, “Follow me!” That is the only praise worthy of Palm Sunday.

Lord, help me step off the curb today and join your parade. Amen!”