

ONE IN A CROWD

Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019

Isaiah 50: 4-9a Philippians 2: 5-11

Lexington Presbyterian Church

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Today we had the Palm Sunday Parade. Everybody loves a parade. Except maybe in the pouring rain. We had a huge Martin Luther King parade and it was as cold as any January day in Lexington. But people come to parades for different reasons. Some come to see the fire engines and cement trucks, some come to see their children or grandchildren or spouses. Some come to support the community. Some just like people watching.

But the first Palm Sunday parade was different. By and large I imagine they came to see one person -Jesus. His works of healing and preaching and his going against the establishment had brought people from far and wide to support him. There were people who had seen his miracles, had heard his teaching, had experienced his love. There were others that had doubts.

Today we are going to hear from some of those people in the crowd. You may recognize them, you may not. But here possibly is what was going through their minds. As you hear their inner thoughts compare them to your thoughts about who and what Jesus is to you.

The Healed Man

Wow I can't believe this crowd. I know it is the Passover but I have never seen a crowd this big. But I can understand it, too. Everyone has been talking about how Jesus would be here. I've heard it in shops, and from those working the grapes, and from the women in the court yards. But how could that not happen. Jesus has been among the people for many months. Whenever he sits down to talk to people, or even as he is walking from one place to another, people are drawn to listen to his words. I wonder why I am here now, myself.

I didn't know what Jesus was about. Jesus was so different than I expected him to be; different than anyone expected him to be. I still have questions. And yet I cannot deny that he has a hold on my life. Ever since that day, that day when my friends didn't know what else to do for me, so they took me to see Jesus. They lowered me from the roof to put me at the feet of Jesus. Can you believe that? They could have broken my neck, if they had dropped me, for goodness sake. But because of their faith, Jesus healed me. Before that I had no faith. I'm not sure what I am supposed to believe now but I know that Jesus cared enough for me, that he took away my illness. Jesus cared for me but he also saw the care my friends had for me. In the end, I couldn't turn my back on the love this man showed to so many people.

This is a great day for a parade. I'm glad I'm here. I'm glad so many people are following Jesus. I will follow him wherever he goes. Maybe this week will help me understand and I can figure out what I am supposed to believe about Jesus.

Mary Magdalene

Oh, God I can't watch this. Jesus in the middle of this huge crowd. Oh, I know he is used to big crowds, but I can just feel in my inmost being that something is going to happen. Something bad. Jesus has been saying awful things in the last weeks. About how he is going to die. And just not die be killed. He says things that I can't understand. Not even his disciples understand what he means. It makes me heartsick with worry. And his mother, ever since that argument they had, she has kept her distance. But I know from the look in her eyes she is carrying a heavy burden.

And look at all these people yelling and cheering, just one following the other without a thought in their heads. This is just a crowd looking for something to entertain themselves. Don't they get it? If Jesus was here to entertain he wouldn't be on that little donkey. Others would have him on a stallion galloping through the streets, showing off his power and might. But that is so opposite of who Jesus is. Haven't they heard a single thing he said? The first shall be last and servant of all. Come as a little child into the Kingdom of heaven. Love your neighbor as yourself. But he knew that often what he said fell on deaf ears. And from the looks of this crowd, their hearing hasn't improved.

What I know is that Jesus loved me. How did he put it...? "Not as the world loves...." That was always sort of a joke between us. But I understood, he loved me in a way that went beyond any human love. And the other thing I know is that no matter what happens, whether it is today or weeks from now, that love will always be with me. No one can take it away. I will hold Jesus in my heart forever.

Zacchaeus

I wasn't going to come this morning. I knew it would be like every other time there is a crowd. I'm always pushed to the side.

I can't believe that I am seeing Jesus again. He's right over there. There are so many people I can only get a glimpse of him. (sigh) Still he came to my house. He asked to come to my house to share a meal. We sat face to face and ate together. And he knew who - **and what** - I was, there was no mistaking that. That day my life changed. There was such goodness in him, I trusted him immediately. It wasn't like he made me change, I wanted to change for the kindness he showed me. It makes such a difference to be with someone, someone who will listen, really listen to the complications in your life and they believe you can be changed. And I was. I guess that is why I am here today. I am grateful to Jesus for accepting me for who I am and still loving me. No one had done that before.

What I wonder now is what is Jesus doing in this crowd during Passover with all these Roman soldiers around. I can feel the tension in the air even while this unruly crowd is shouting praises to Jesus. They say "Hosanna!" but I wonder if they really mean it. I've seen this happen before. The crowd just follows but they don't really know where they are going. They can turn on a denarius. I've been there and done that. My hope is that Jesus knows this crowd better than they know themselves. In my book, I'd take a bet on Jesus any day. He did that for me and it changed my life. But the crowd is moving now, maybe I can get a better look...

Centurion

Why did I have to be assigned here today of all days? This week of all weeks? At least this doesn't seem like an angry crowd, but there are so many of them. I have good men in my charge, as long as nothing gets out of hand, everything should be alright. And what I know of this man, Jesus, he's not known for being violent. In fact even with his own people he tells them stories to settle them down. I've seen it work. I've heard some of those stories, it makes you think about why – and how - we do what we do.

Well, I do what I do because I am ordered to do it. It makes life simpler that way. You get ahead in this man's army by doing what you are told and not asking any questions. But this Jesus' followers are always asking questions. What is the greatest commandment? Ha! The greatest commandment is whatever comes out of Caesar's mouth! Oh and another good question – How do you enter the Kingdom of Heaven? As if anyone on earth knows that. You would have to be God or at least God's Son to know that.

Well, we will see how this week turns out. I will be glad when this Passover is over and everyone goes back to wherever they came from. I can't believe how many people have turned out to see Jesus – and he is riding on a donkey. What kind of message is he trying to send? What kind of leader does something like that? Not any kind that I know of. And yet everyone is here calling him The Anointed One. Caesar better not hear that or it's the end of Jesus. What I don't get are the stories of how he heals people. Even a cohort leader's son was healed. That's one of my own. Maybe Jesus is the Son of God. We will see, we will see....

Where would you have fit into the crowd on that first Palm Sunday morning? What does it mean to you to have Jesus in your life today? Which of the people in that crowd could tell your story?

Jesus died for our sins just a few days after the joyful, triumphant day. So many in the crowd were shouting Hosanna on Palm Sunday and give us "Barabbas" just a few days later. The same crowd, such a different attitude. Do we account this to loss of faith or crowd mentality?

The question to ask ourselves to day is where do we go, what path do we walk, after the Palm Sunday Parade.