

April 13, 2003
AM Service – Palm Sunday
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

"When The Cheering Stopped"
Matt 21:1-17

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 Shucks! The one Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!"

Matt 21:1-17

21:1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest!"

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

11 The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

14 The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

16 "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read,

"'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"

17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Some years ago a book was written by Gene Smith, a noted American historian. The title was "When The Cheering Stopped." It was the story of President Woodrow Wilson and

the events leading up to and following WWI. When that war was over Wilson was an international hero. There was a great spirit of optimism abroad, and people actually believed that the last war had been fought and the world had been made safe for democracy.

On his first visit to Paris after the war Wilson was greeted by cheering mobs. He was actually more popular than their own heroes. The same thing was true in England and Italy. In a Vienna hospital a Red Cross worker had to tell the children that there would be no Christmas presents because of the war and the hard times. The children didn't believe her. They said that President Wilson was coming and they knew that everything would be all right.

The cheering lasted about a year. Then it gradually began to stop. It turned out that the political leaders in Europe were more concerned with their own agendas than they were a lasting peace. At home, Woodrow Wilson ran into opposition in the United States Senate and his League of Nations was not ratified. Under the strain of it all the President's health began to break. In the next election his party was defeated. So it was that Woodrow Wilson, a man who barely a year or two earlier had been heralded as the new world Messiah, came to the end of his days a broken and defeated man.

It's a sad story, but one that is not altogether unfamiliar. The ultimate reward for someone who tries to translate ideals into reality is apt to be frustration and defeat. There are some exceptions, of course, but not too many.

It happened that way to Jesus. When he emerged on the public scene he was an overnight sensation. He would try to go off to be alone and the people would still follow him. The masses lined the streets as he came into town. On Palm Sunday leafy palm branches were spread before him and there were shouts of Hosanna. In shouting Hosanna they were in effect saying "Save us now" Jesus. Great crowds came to hear him preach. A wave of religious expectation swept the country.

But the cheering did not last for long. There came a point when the tide began to turn against him. Oh, you didn't notice it so much at first. People still came to see him, but the old excitement was missing, and the crowds were not as large as they had been. His critics now began to publicly attack him. That was something new. Earlier they had been afraid to speak out for fear of the masses, but they began to perceive that the fickle public was turning on him. Soon the opposition began to snowball. When they discovered that they could not discredit his moral character, they began to take more desperate measures. Before it was all over a tidal wave welled up that brought Jesus to his knees under the weight of a cross.

Why did the masses so radically turn against him? How did the shouts of Hosanna on Sunday transform into the shouts of crucify him on Friday? I am not just talking about the immediate events that may have brought it about, but the deeper root causes. What were the underlying issues? In five days it all fell apart. Why? That is the issue that I would like for us to concentrate on this morning. Why did the cheering stop?

1. Jesus Began To Talk More And More About Commitment.

As I read this story I thought about the people who owned the donkey. Jesus tells His disciples to go into the village. There they will see a donkey and its colt. He tells them to untie them and bring them to Him (notice that Matthew records that both a donkey and its colt were taken.). If asked what they were doing, they were to answer, "The Lord needs them and will bring them back shortly." Donkeys were valuable in those days. It would be like borrowing someone's car. This is why they assure the owners of the return of his animals. By this time many in Jerusalem would have known Jesus, so the owners were willing to let Jesus borrow their prized possession. Yet, it still showed commitment on the owner's part to give Jesus the use of their valued possessions.

The donkey had to be untied before Jesus could use it. We too must be released from worldly attachments if we are to serve Christ. Are we willing to commit ourselves and our possessions to Jesus to be used as He desires?

Perhaps some of you saw Mel Gibson's movie that came out a couple of years ago called Braveheart. In the movie William Wallace (a Scottish commoner) attempts to unite the feuding clans of Scotland in their fight against England in the 13th century. He attempts to elicit the help of Robert the Bruce, the leader of the most powerful clan. Bruce refuses to help and in soliloquy he says: "Wallace is an uncompromising man. Uncompromising men are admirable. But only a compromising man can be king."

Maybe that is true of worldly kings. We must compromise if we seek to be popular with all people. But Jesus, to be King of all history, had to be uncompromising in His commitment to the Father and to the Father's will. The cheering stopped because people were not willing to be uncompromising in their commitment to God.

2. Jesus Dared To Suggest That All People Are Worth Loving.

Bill Wilson pastors an inner city church in New York City. His mission field is a very violent place. He himself has been stabbed twice as he ministered to the people of the community surrounding the church. Once a Puerto Rican woman became involved in the church and was led to Christ. After her conversion she came to Pastor Wilson and said, "I want to do something to help with the church's ministry." He asked her what her talents were and she could think of nothing---she couldn't even speak English---but she did love children. So he put her on one of the church's buses that went into neighborhoods and transported kids to church. Every week she performed her duties. She would find the worst-looking kid on the bus, put him on her lap and whisper over and over the only words she had learned in English: "I love you. Jesus loves you."

After several months, she became attached to one little boy in particular. The boy didn't speak. He came to Sunday School every week with his sister and sat on the woman's lap, but he never made a sound. Each week she would tell him all the way to Sunday School and all the way home, "I love you and Jesus loves you."

One day, to her amazement, the little boy turned around and stammered, "I---I---I love you too!" Then he put his arms around her and gave her a big hug. That was 2:30 on a Sunday afternoon. At 6:30 that night he was found dead. His own mother had beaten him to death and thrown his body in the trash..."I love you and Jesus loves you.".... Those were some of the last words this little boy heard in his short life---from the lips of a Puerto Rican woman who could barely speak English. This woman gave her one talent to God and because of that a little boy who never heard the word "love" in his own home, experienced and responded to the love of Christ...

[Here was a lady who went to the outcast and rejected and offered love. Jesus went to those that were not welcomed by the religious in the temple. Are we willing to go to the rejected of this world? And to offer what little we have to give in our service to the unloved and unwanted of this world]

What can you give? What is your "colt"? You and I each have something in our lives, which, if given back to God, could, like the colt, move Jesus and His message further down the road. (Mark Adams, *"The Roads He Walked - Palm Avenue"*).

A number of years ago, Newsweek magazine carried the story of the memorial service held for Hubert Humphrey, former vice-president of the United States. Hundreds of people came from all over the world to say good-bye to their old friend and colleague. But one person who came was shunned and ignored by virtually everyone there. Nobody would look at him, much less speak to him. That person was former president Richard Nixon. Not long before, he had gone through the shame and infamy of Watergate. He was back in Washington for the first time since his resignation from the presidency.

Then a very special thing happened, perhaps the only thing that could have made a difference and broken the ice. President Jimmy Carter, who was in the White House at that time, came into the room. Before he was seated, he saw Nixon over against the wall, all by himself. He went over to [him] as though he were greeting a family member, stuck out his hand to the former president, and smiled broadly. To the surprise of everyone there, the two of them embraced each other, and Carter said, "Welcome home, Mr. President! Welcome home!"

Commenting on that, Newsweek magazine asserted, "If there was a turning point in Nixon's long ordeal in the wilderness, it was that moment and that gesture of love and compassion." (As told by Maxie Dunnam in *The Workbook on Living as a Christian*, pp.112-113)

Jesus got in trouble because He went to the "unholy" the "unworthy" and those with a bad reputation. Jesus is still not only in the church, He is in the world. Jesus took risks and wants us to take risks in order to reach people in the world with His message. We have a saying when we are leaving each other's company. We say, "Take care." What we should say is, "Take risks!" Let's not be a "Take Care" people but a "Take Risks" people.

3. Jesus Began To Talk More And More About A Cross.

Some years ago, a new pastor was called to a spiritually dead church in a small Oklahoma town. The pastor spent the first week calling on as many members as possible, inviting them to the first Sunday service. But the effort failed. In spite of many calls, not a single member showed up for worship! So the pastor placed a notice in the local paper stating that since the church was dead, the pastor was going to give it a decent, Christian burial. The funeral for the church would be held at 2 p.m. on the following Sunday.

Morbidly curious, the whole town turned out for the "funeral." In front of the pulpit, there was a large casket, smothered in flowers. After the eulogy was given, the pastor invited the congregation to come forward and pay their respects to the dead church. The long line of mourners filed by. Each one peered curiously into the open casket, and then quickly turned away with a guilty, sheepish look. For inside the casket... (was a mirror, and as each look into the coffin they saw their reflection in it).

Ironically we must die to ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus if we are going to go from being dead, to being alive spiritually

Before we become too critical of Jerusalem, ask yourself this question: What city even today would not be shaken by Jesus' entry into it? Imagine Jesus entering New York, or even Patchogue. Oh, I'm sure we'd welcome Him with our hosannas - at first, anyway. We'd line the streets and strike up the band and have a grand parade right down Main Street. But I'm equally sure that, by the end of the week, we'd have Him nailed to a cross, too. Why? Because the Kingdom Jesus came to establish still threatens the kingdoms of this world -- your kingdom and mine -- the kingdoms where greed, power, selfishness and lust rule instead of grace, mercy, peace and love. And who among us really wants to surrender our lives to that Kingdom and that King?

Why did the cheering stop? Because:

Jesus Began to talk more and more about commitment.

Jesus dared to suggest that all people are worth loving.

Jesus began to talk more and more about a cross.