

April 13, 2014

God's Emotional Week

The Excitement of Palm Sunday

John 12:12-19; Exodus 12:29-32

Opening words: There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not a single one should be wasted. Have you every stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? However, there is one week that changed our world forever, Holy Week! On the Christian calendar Holy Week is the last week of Lent, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending at dawn on Easter. It is the week the church remembers the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry.

This year I want to look at the role emotions played in Holy Week. Mark Twain once said, "Any emotion, if it is sincere, is involuntary." Just think about it for a moment. Emotions do play a large part in the Holy Week drama. The crowd was excited on Palm Sunday. The disciples were perplexed on Maundy Thursday. The mob was devastated on Good Friday. The believers were overwhelmed with joy on Easter. Each one of these emotions played a large part in the Holy Week drama.

Today is Palm Sunday and the crowd was excited! Being excited means you are emotionally aroused or stirred. You know the scene. It is found in each one of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Jesus is entering the Golden City, Jerusalem. The expectations of the people are high. They are confident something big is going to happen. They were right! God was about to change everything. May God give you ears to hear John's version of that great day, John 12:13-19. Let me call this message, *Excited on Palm Sunday!*

John 12:12-19 ¹² The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,
"Hosanna!"

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

"Blessed is the king of Israel!"

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

¹⁵ "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;
see, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey's colt."

¹⁶ At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

¹⁷ Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸ Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

On Monday evening, the University of Connecticut Huskies were crowned champions of the men's college basketball world. It is really quite a feat. Did you know there are 346 division 1 college basketball teams, which exist in 32 different conferences, plus four independent schools? Each one of those schools plays the regular season hoping to be invited into the 64-team NCAA tournament. Those teams play a single game elimination tournament. The experts seed the teams from best to worst. I love it when the experts are wrong and underdogs emerge. The last team standing was the UConn Huskies. The celebration began during the last few seconds of the game. I have never spent any quality time in Connecticut, but it was fun to watch. I spend too much time with people during a crisis. That is why I found it fun watching people who are truly excited. They showed people in Hartford celebrating. They showed the fans in the stands celebrating. They showed the coaching staff and the players celebrating. Everyone was excited! I have to ask you this question. When was the last time you were excited? Let there be no doubt about it. The crowd on that first Palm Sunday was excited. If you have ever been excited in your life say, "**Amen!**"

If you want to completely understand the scripture lesson for today then you have to go back 3,300 years. The story is recorded for us in the Old Testament book of Exodus. Do you remember the story? The descendants of Abraham had been spared from a great famine by following Joseph into Egypt. During his life they had been shown favor, but time changed things. Joseph was forgotten and the Egyptians enslaved his descendants. Their lives were hard and they cried out to God. He heard their cries and sent them a great liberator, Moses. Their freedom does not come in an instant. It comes at the end of a series of great plagues. The last was the worst, the death of the first-born sons. The will of the Pharaoh is broken and the Hebrew people are given their freedom. That day was such a great day that the people held an annual festival to remember what God had done just for them.

Fast forward the clock thirteen hundred years. The people came to Jerusalem to remember what God had done for them one more time. This brings us to the scripture lesson for today. It was a special Passover. For it was the Passover that brought Jesus to Jerusalem. Everyone knew the name Jesus. Everyone had heard about his teachings. Everyone had heard about his healings. Jesus was the one who brought Lazarus back to life! Some had felt his powerful presence. Everyone believed Jesus was going to usher in something new. There is no other way to say it. The crowd was excited. This is the question I want to ask you today. Why was the crowd excited on that day? It is a good question. How do you answer the question? There are a wide variety of good answers. I am going to look at three.

Away

Some say the crowd on Palm Sunday was excited because they were simply away from home. I think there is some truth to that answer. Their lives were hard. Every day looked about the same. Every week looked about the same. Sometimes it is just nice to get away. There was a law that said all Jewish males within a fifty mile radius of Jerusalem were required to attend the Passover in Jerusalem. That law wasn't needed.

People didn't attend the Passover because they had to go. They attended the Passover because they wanted to go. It would be like passing a law that everyone was required to celebrate Thanksgiving. It isn't necessary. We look forward to Thanksgiving and they looked forward to Passover. If nothing else, it was a time to just get away. Have you ever gone away just to "get away"?

I have a good friend who went to North Carolina to celebrate his brother-in-law's 50th birthday. (You know how some have to make a big deal out of their birthday!) When he returned home I asked him, "Rick, did you have a good time?" He answered, "Yes, I guess." Then he told me about his trip. They were in complete isolation. The restaurants didn't serve his favorite adult beverage. The weather was cold and foggy. His bed was lumpy. The party, itself, was attended by some shady characters. At the end of his stories I said, "So you didn't have a good time?" He said, "Well, it was nice just getting away." It isn't just his story, it is all of our stories. Maybe it was their story? Sometimes, just getting away can be exciting! Maybe the crowd was excited because they had just gotten away?

People

Some say the crowd on Palm Sunday was excited because they were with the most important people in their lives. Passover had both a religious and a secular side. The religious side had to do with remembering what God had done for the Hebrew people. The secular side had to do with that particular day. It was a reunion. Everyone was in Jerusalem. People you had not seen in a year or longer were there. They were excited because they were with the most important people in their lives. Passover was like a great family reunion. It is exciting to see family. (It is more exciting to see them go home.)

Several months ago the news was filled with the story of Katheryn DePrill. Do you remember her story? She is the young woman who was looking for her biological mother on Facebook. Her biological mother had left her as an infant in the bathroom of their local Burger King years ago. Katheryn was looking for her to fill a void in her life. If you haven't heard, her biological mother stepped forward. She openly admitted her mistake and told her side of the story. She had been sexually attacked at the age of sixteen, had the baby alone in her bedroom and headed to Burger King. She is relieved to know her baby is such a wonderful young woman. Katheryn's biological mother cannot thank her parents enough for what they have done for her baby. Katheryn said when she met her biological mother there was a lot of emotions and everyone was excited. Maybe the people were just excited on Palm Sunday because they were reunited with the people in their lives?

Hope

Some say the crowd on Palm Sunday was excited because Jesus represented hope. They had grown tired of foreign domination and longed to be free. They had heard about Jesus' miracles and knew he had a special power. They wanted him to use that power against the Romans. Everything they did that day was political. They laid palm branches on the ground and waved them in the air. That is what previous generations did for their conquering heroes. They yelled political things. *"Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!"*

They were excited because they knew change was coming. They just didn't know what kind. Maybe that is why the people were so excited on Palm Sunday? They were filled with hope because they wanted their lives to change. Let me ask you one more question.

Why are you excited on this Palm Sunday? Maybe you are excited because spring has finally come after a long cold winter. Maybe you are excited because your children are going to be home for the holiday? Maybe you are excited because it is expected. Can I be honest with you? I have a hard time being excited on Palm Sunday. It has nothing to do with extra work. I love my job. I have a hard time being excited on Palm Sunday because of Jesus. Annually, we go through this pilgrimage. We remember what Christ did and endured for us! The crowd was excited on that first Palm Sunday because they didn't know. We know what Christ endured. How can we be excited?

This year I challenge you to take a few minutes out of each day this week and remember what Jesus did on that particular day. It will change the way you experience Palm Sunday. It will change the way you experience Easter. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus's week went something like this:

On **Palm Sunday**, Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem by the crowd. It was the point of no return.

On **Holy Monday**, Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple and cursed the fig tree.

On **Holy Tuesday**, Jesus taught from dawn to dusk and challenged the Pharisees.

On **Holy Wednesday**, some call it "Spy Wednesday," Judas Iscariot agreed to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Meanwhile, Jesus was being anointed with expensive perfume. It was symbolic of his burial.

On **Holy Thursday**, Maundy Thursday, Jesus had his last supper with the disciples. He transformed the traditional Seder into something new; Communion, a living memorial.

On **Holy Friday**, the sinless Jesus was arrested, tried and buried. He was executed like a common criminal on a cross. He was the perfect sacrifice. His sacrificial death covered the sins of the world.

On **Holy Saturday**, some call it "Silent Saturday," nothing happened because Jesus was dead.

On **Easter Sunday**, Resurrection Day, Jesus returns to life and changes our world forever.

This year I challenge you not to just jump from the excitement of Palm Sunday to the overwhelming joy of Easter. Every day this week take a few minutes and remember what Christ did for you on that particular day. You will develop a whole new appreciation for the Master. Let me end with this thought.

Last week I told you about the cathedral in Milan, Italy. There are the three main doors which welcome the worshippers. The two side doors remind us that both pleasant and unpleasant experiences in life are temporary. It is the main door which reminds us of what is really important, the eternal. Jesus knew what was really important.

How much time do you spend worrying about the temporary? How much time do you spend worrying about eternity? How much time do you spend thinking about Jesus, our only hope of salvation?

Will you pray with me?