

March 28, 2021

2021 Palm Sunday
When the Cheering Stopped
Mark 11:1-11

Opening words: There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not 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 everything, Holy Week! On the Christian calendar, Holy Week is the last week in Lent, beginning today, Palm Sunday, and ending at dawn on Easter. It is the week the church remembers the passion of Jesus. It recalls the expectations of Palm Sunday, the rejection of Holy Wednesday, the memorializing of Jesus on Maundy Thursday, the devastation of Good Friday and the final victory of Easter morning.

This is Palm Sunday, and on this day, we remember how Jesus bravely rode into the Golden City, Jerusalem, to observe his final Passover. It is an important day. So important, each one of the Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) record the event because it signaled the beginning of the end. In March of 2016, Christian blogger Doug Eaton wrote there are three reasons why Palm Sunday is so important:

1. **Jesus was setting the crucifixion in motion.** It was the first time Jesus let people praise him as king. In doing so he brought both Jewish and Roman wrath on himself.
2. **Jesus was being selected as the Passover lamb according to Old Testament law.** Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Unknown to the crowd, their acceptance of Jesus on Palm Sunday meant they were accepting him as the Passover lamb.
3. **Jesus was marching to his own death, and he knew it.** Jesus was not just riding into Jerusalem. He was riding toward his own death.

However, today I do not want to just talk about the death of Jesus. I want to talk about the crowd. In many ways they were not much different from us. Our scripture lesson for today is Mark 11:1-11. Let me call this message this morning *When the Cheering Stopped*.

Mark 11:1-11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples,
2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.
3 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' "
4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it,
5 some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?"
6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

- 7** When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it.
- 8** Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields.
- 9** Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
- 10** "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"
- 11** Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

We find ourselves today in the eleventh chapter of Mark. Like visiting an old friend, we find these words to be comforting. According to the text, it was time for the Passover. A time to remember their proud past as God's Chosen People. The law required the people to attend within a certain radius, however no legislation was necessary. Everyone wanted to be a part of the great holiday. It was a time to do three things. First, they made their annual animal sacrifice at the temple. Second, they paid their annual taxes. Third, it was a time to reconnect with family and friends. It is for that reason that everyone wanted to be in Jerusalem for the Passover. Over the years, preachers, including myself, have emphasized the massive cheering crowd. Let me say this clearly.

It was a great crowd of people! The size of the crowd cannot be over emphasized. Mark says many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut palm branches from nearby fields. Some people followed Jesus; some people ran ahead of Jesus (Mark 11:8-9). Matthew calls it a very large crowd (Matthew 21:8). Luke says the crowd was so great that the religious leaders encouraged Jesus to rebuke them (Luke 19:39). John tells of a great crowd that had gathered for the festival (John 12:12). You cannot question the size of the crowd.

It has been estimated that the population of Jerusalem swelled to 2,500,000 on that Passover. That is based on the number of animal sacrifices made. That was a massive crowd at that time in that place in history. That was 1% of their world's population. According to the United States Census Bureau, the total world population in the year 33 AD was approximately 285 million. If 2.5 million people were present in Jerusalem on the day Jesus entered, then approximately .9% of the world's population was present. Those numbers are hard to comprehend, but it is safe to say approximately 1% of the world's population was present in Jerusalem that day. (1% of the world's population today is 7.8 million.) The largest Christian gathering in the history of the world is six million. That crowd gathered in 2015, when the Pope went to Manila. It was a great crowd of people. However, the size of the crowd was not everything. You can question the integrity of the crowd. They were selfish. They all wanted something from Jesus. If that makes you think say, "**Hosanna!**"

There is an old preaching story about a rabbi who was visiting a friend. He took the

friend to a window and asked him what he saw. The friend replied, "I see men, women and children." Then, he took his friend to a mirror and asked, "What do you see now?" The friend replied, "I see myself!" The rabbi replied, "That is the choice we must make in life! Are we going to look through the window and see others? Or are we going to look at the mirror and only see ourselves?" You are a disciple of Jesus Christ! You have no choice. Jesus looked through the window and saw the needs of this world. You must look through the window too. That was not the case of the crowd. That is not the case of many in our world. Selfishness blinds us of the real meaning behind Palm Sunday. Just think about it.

Some cheered for Jesus for political reasons! Some in the crowd expected a political Messiah. They had grown tired of foreign domination. They had grown tired of Roman ways and laws. They longed for independence and believed Jesus had everything needed to lead a successful political revolution. Just like their ancestors did in the past after a successful military campaign, they waved palms and chanted political slogans. *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.* "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David." *Hosanna in the highest heaven.* "They were not wrong. Jesus did have the right stuff for political success, but they missed the memo. Jesus did not come with a political agenda. Jesus came for spiritual reasons. Jesus came to be the bridge between mankind and God. If you get the point say, "**Hosanna!**" Do you know of anyone who tries to use Jesus politically? They say true Christians are their political party.

Some cheered for Jesus for personal reasons! Jesus's miracles were well known. They had heard how Jesus brought sight to the blind. They had heard how Jesus got the lame to walk. They had heard how Jesus had exercised demons. If Jesus could do that for others, then why not them, or a loved one? The crowd was filled with the blind, the lame, and the limited. They cheered for Jesus to get his attention because they wanted a healing. The problem is they did not get the memo. Jesus did not come to improve their health care system. Jesus came for spiritual reasons. He came to be the bridge between mankind and God. If you get the point say, "**Hosanna!**" Do you know of anyone who is mad at God because a sick loved one was never healed?

Some cheered for Jesus because Jesus was popular! In 1997, Hanson had their one hit wonder, MMBop. The song was nominated for a Grammy because everyone was listening to that catchy tune and those clever words. Hanson even sang the National Anthem the 1997 World Series between the Indians and the Marlins in Cleveland. Their father predicted they would become more popular than the Jackson Five. He was WRONG! Their popularity faded and no one has heard from Hanson in years. Rumor has it they are singing at birthday parties and grocery store openings. However, in 1997, they were trending. On that first Palm Sunday, Jesus was trending. On the lips of everyone was the name Jesus. Everybody seemed to have an opinion about him. Some believed and some did not believe, but everyone had an opinion. The problem is they did not get the memo. Jesus did not come to be a celebrity. Jesus came

for spiritual reasons. He came to the bridge between mankind and God. If you get the point say, **Hosanna!** Do you know of anyone who must be in the middle of the action?

For years preacher, including myself, have made a big deal about the size of the cheering crowd on that day. Perhaps, there is more. After all, the cheering crowd disbanded after a short time and the streets of Jerusalem grew quiet. However, the committed stayed near Jesus. It is safe to say a small minority in the crowd understood what was happening on that day. The Apostle Paul said it best nearly 30 years later in his letter to the Philippians. Speaking of Jesus, he said, *"And being found in the appearance of a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross."*

Annually, I attend the Mahoning Valley Spring District Conference of the United Methodist Church. It is not favorite part of my job. Our district is made up of 57 congregations. It is an afternoon filled with reports and voting. It is as exciting as it sounds. It never disappoints. The meeting rotates annually. This year, we host in on April 18. Several years ago, it was held at Warren Grace. On that day, a woman came up to me when the meeting concluded and asked, "Did you go to McKinley School?" I said, "Yes!" McKinley was my elementary school. She said, "I was your first-grade teacher!" I drew a blank. I had to look at her name tag. Her name is Mary Fuller. I thought, "Are you still alive?" I said, "You were a lot taller in those days." We talked for a few moments about my experience in the first grade and then it was over. I enjoyed talking to her.

As I drove home, I thought about Mrs. Fuller. I do not have many memories. It was a long time ago. To be honest, I only have one clear recollection of the first grade. The date was November 22, 1963. The public address system crackled on. I can still hear our principle's voice, Mr. Yerman, telling the school that President Kennedy (1917-1963) had been assassinated in Dallas. I remember looking at Mrs. Fuller. She seemed stunned. She walked out of the classroom and into the hall. She gathered with the other teachers. They were talking about the sad news, then something happened that caught me off guard. I can remember one of the teachers began to cry. I do not think I will ever forget that sound. Those tears pierced my heart. Maybe we give too much time talking about the cheers of the massive crowd, and not enough time talking about tears of the committed minority? The crowd cheered on Palm Sunday. The committed cried on Good Friday.

On Friday evening we are going to gather at Green Haven Memorial Gardens. It is one of our local cemeteries. For what it is, it is a nice place. But what is it? It is a place for the dead. Some people will not go because it is a cemetery. They will be there soon enough. However, I think it is a place we must go. It underscores the fact that Jesus died. We will read the final words he uttered, and we will remember his pain. It is five days from now, but I know what I will hear when I leave. It happens every year. As I walk through the silent crowd after the closing words, I will hear someone crying. It will

hit them like a ton of bricks, Jesus died for them! Jesus died for us! Jesus died for you and me. There will be no cheers on Friday evening, only tears. How many tears will you shed for Jesus on Friday? Rick Warren (born 1954) of the Saddleback Church in California said, *"Nothing will shape your life more than the commits you make."* How committed are you? And all of God's people said, **"Hosanna!"**