

Wesley United Methodist Church

March 29, 2015

“Get Out the Ticker Tape...”

Mark 11:1-11

There is a story about a young boy who was sick. It was Palm Sunday and the children waved palm branches to open the service. But this young boy stayed home from church with his mother. When his father returned from church he was holding a palm branch and the young boy was curious and asked, “Why do we have palm branches on Palm Sunday and why do we call this day Palm Sunday?” “You see,” his dad explained, “when Jesus came into town, everyone waved palm branches to honor him, so we got palm branches in worship service today.” The little boy was visibly upset and replied, “Aw, darn! The one Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up.”

Well, I’m confident that Jesus will show up today, even though we will not be able to welcome him with quite the excitement with which the crowd in Jerusalem welcomed him 2,000 years ago. Someone has compared the reception Jesus received to a ticker-tape parade in New York City honoring heroes and celebrities.

Some of our younger people might wonder what a ticker-tape is. For you who have never seen the stuff, ticker-tape refers to long, narrow strands of paper, with holes punched in them. These strands of paper once carried information about the performance of the New York Stock Exchange.

As the information was entered by machines, holes were punched in the tape as it fed through, and other machines would read the information for the benefit of brokers and investors. It was sort of an early computer all very modern in the first half of the twentieth century. Come to think of it, I operated such a machine in the very early seventies to send orders and receipts to France and Belgium. We called it a teletype. Ok, back to New York. After using these early computers there was a problem. They didn’t know what to do with all the tape that had gone through the reader and was no longer useful.

Someone said that all the ticker-tape was waste paper and even then, expensive to get rid of so it was suggested to stage a parade for some heroes and dump the whole mess out off the window.

This is not quite true. Actually, the greatest honor that the city of New York can bestow upon an individual or a collection of individuals, like athletes, is to throw a ticker-tape parade. Since the first parade in 1886, more than 200 of these celebrations have taken place. Since then thousands of tons of paper have descended on the heads of various kinds of heroes. In 1951, 3,240 tons of paper showered Gen. Douglas MacArthur as his motorcade went through Manhattan. And 3,474 tons drifted down on the first astronaut to orbit the earth, John Glenn in 1962.

By the late 1960, the stock exchange upgraded to electronic boards, leaving them with little use for ticker-tape. So, enterprising office workers resorted to shredding regular computer paper and throwing it out the window. Somehow that didn’t work very well. One year an overzealous office worker neglected to tear the pages out of an old phone book. Instead she threw the whole book out window; it struck a passerby and knocked him unconscious. Maybe that’s one reason ticker-tape parades are less common these days. Another reason might be that now many office buildings are built with sealed windows which are not intended to be opened.

For a few moments, I want you to imagine the exhilaration of a ticker-tape parade on a much smaller scale in Jerusalem in about 30 A.D. Imagine the excitement that surrounds this occasion. Jesus is coming to town. Some say he’s a great teacher. Others, a great healer. Still others say he is the Messiah, come to lead the people of Judea against the awesome might of Rome.

Let’s visualize that scene in our mind’s eye. Let your ears be filled with the beautiful sounds of “Hosanna to the Son of David.” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” Our minds will become burdened with many somber and disturbing events if we let them wander beyond this day to the events of Holy Week. For a few moments, let’s bask in this time of victory that is Palm Sunday.

The account of Palm Sunday is one of the few events in the New Testament that is recorded in all four gospels. Details vary slightly, as they always do when eye-witness accounts are the basis for reporting, but the major details remain intact. As we visualize this great event I want you to focus on the manner Jesus entered the Holy City, the reaction of the crowds to his coming and its meaning for us.

It was time for the Passover celebration. The Passover was one of three feasts that Jews were supposed to attend in Jerusalem. As a result, the population of Jerusalem swelled immensely. As a good Jew, Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. In preparation Jesus did something quite unusual. He instructed his

disciples to borrow a young donkey upon which no one had ridden for him to ride as he entered the city. He also equipped them with a response in the event that they were questioned about taking the animal. They were to say, "The Lord needs it and will send it back shortly." It's interesting, Jesus and his followers had probably come by foot all the way from Galilee. But now for the last two miles Jesus decided to ride a donkey. This was obviously to fulfill the prophecy found in Zachariah 9:9, "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout Daughter Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

After borrowing the colt the disciples placed their cloaks on it as a saddle for Jesus to continue the journey. Jesus didn't ride in a chariot or on a large and imposing horse. He rode a young donkey, an insignificant animal generally thought of as a beast of burden.

On the other side of town, Pontius Pilate was entering Jerusalem about the same time on a horse, the symbol of war and power.

Let's notice the reaction of the crowd. Mark noted that, as Jesus entered the Holy City, many people spread their cloaks on the road while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Victorious kings were honored in this fashion in biblical times. Many in the crowd were welcoming a king. They anticipated that he would lead an insurrection against the established order. They did not realize that his kingdom was not of this world.

While he rode into the city the crowd was singing, "Hosanna in the highest." For many in the crowd that day, this was a moment of splendid adoration. We see Jesus being worshiped here by the crowds, but in a few days these same people who are singing, "Hosanna" will be shouting for him to be crucified.

Not everyone who sings praises to Christ can be counted on when the going gets rough. They were in a mood to celebrate but when tough decisions were being made, such as choosing Jesus or Barabbas, the crowd would forget that just a few days prior they were hailing Jesus as their King.

Not even those who seemed to be close to Christ remained faithful when the crowd turned against him. One of his disciples denied him and another betrayed him with a kiss. Of course, some persons were there just out of curiosity. They were just following the crowd. They saw the excitement and wondered what was going on and just started shouting like the others. Someone once commented, "When people are free to do as they please, they usually imitate each other." We know that's true.

I read some time ago a story about a man in Utah who put this "follow the crowd" phenomenon to good use. He had bought a store but it wasn't doing well. No one came to the store to see his merchandise, so he had almost no business. He was on a main road so that wasn't the problem. People just didn't stop.

One day he got an idea. Knowing that most people do follow the crowd, he went out and bought several used cars and parked them in front of his store. Sure enough, now people stopped at his store and all kinds of people began to buy his stuff. They assumed that all the cars out front meant that this must be a great place to shop.

The same thing happens with churches. Some people are attracted to church because their friends are there. Nothing wrong with that it's a great first step. We come to worship for a variety of reasons. Some of us come into this room with a sincere desire to know God's will for our life. Others are still seeking a workable faith. Still others come because their family expects it. You know my story, I went to church so I didn't have to do dishes at home. If I were to ask you today why you are here, what would your answer be? (I'm not asking).

In Matthew 16:15-17 Jesus questioned his disciples. He said to them, "And who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered him, "You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven!" Jesus didn't want Peter and his other disciples to believe he was the Son of God just because he said so. He wanted God to bring them to this conclusion, based on their experience with him.

If you are uncertain about who Jesus is, this is a great place for you to be. Walk with Christ for a while and see for yourself who he is.

The Bible teaches us that there will come a time when God will reign in every heart. There will come a time when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God. Palm Sunday gives us a good example of this event.

Looking at the Gospel accounts together, it becomes clear that the triumphal entry into Jerusalem was a significant event, not only to those people who were there to witness, but to Christians throughout history. We celebrate Palm Sunday to remember that momentous occasion.

Over 1,000 years ago, an Italian bishop named Theodulph, was a prisoner in France. From his jail cell he wrote a poem that Christians have been singing ever since to remember the day Jesus entered Jerusalem.

"All glory, laud, and honor, to Thee Redeemer King! To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring! Thou art the king of Israel, Thou David's royal Son, Who in the Lord's name comest, the King and blessed One." The choir shared these beautiful words with us earlier.

He is our Redeemer King. He deserves our allegiance. He deserves our all.