

Palm Sunday 2011 “The Parade”

Matt. 21:1-11

The world needs heroes. People who rise to the challenges life places in our path, people who face difficulties, trials, even death with courage. We honor our heroes and rightly so. We have parades which honor our heroes.

Everyone loves a parade. Children gather beside the road with flags in hand, waving as the parade goes by. People clap and bands play, the mood is festive. No doubt this was the mood of the first Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem. It was the end of a three year long pilgrimage that took Jesus from obscurity in Nazareth to the very center of a storm that shook the foundations of the world. This pilgrimage neared its end on that first Palm Sunday. As Jesus entered Jerusalem the crowds were excited and friendly, but it wasn't long before there was an abrupt shift in mood. The shouts of the adoring crowds by week's end turned into shouts for his crucifixion. Jesus turned the last corner in his parade. It was a turn that, by most observers, led into a blind alley where his enemies lay in wait to spring the trap. The parade got all tangled-up in that blind alley – confusion reigned. Those who waited in the alley to ambush Jesus had their way. He was arrested, put on trial, condemned and brutally killed. His followers abandoned him and fled.

It had all started out with such promise, this pilgrimage that led to this final parade into Jerusalem. “In the N.T., each Gospel writer opens with a report of pilgrimage. Matthew tells how Magi journeyed from a distant land to lay their gifts before the child of Bethlehem. Mark describes how the people of Jerusalem and Judea, drawn by the prophetic power of John the Baptist, left their homes and journeyed to the Jordan to receive baptism. Luke pictures Mary traveling to the hill country of Judea to meet her cousin Elizabeth. And in the Gospel of John, the first words out of the mouth of Jesus are spoken to two disciples of John the Baptist who had begun to follow him. He asked, “What are you seeking?” They replied, “Where are you staying?” and Jesus said, “Come and see”. In other words, “Come, join my parade.” (Proclamation, Series A 1993 p. 6)

“The life of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels is a single swift campaign of preaching and healing, sweeping through Galilee and climaxing at the temple in Jerusalem.” Early believers, before the word “Christian” was

invented, were known as “**people belonging to the Way**” (Acts 9:2). Xians today are people “on the way” who are drawn to this Jesus and who follow. (Ibid.) Being a Christian isn’t “getting to a certain place” in life, being good, moral, smart. Being Christian is a “process”, a journey in which we grow in our relationship with God in Christ.

Jesus knew the parade route would lead to Jerusalem, and danger and death. His course was intentionally set. Jesus knew he needed to go into that dark, blind alley at the end of the parade, known as death. He said it himself, “**The Son of Man came... to give his life as a ransom for many.**” (Mark 10:45) Jesus knew where his path would take him, yet he stayed the course. He set his sights on Jerusalem and a cross. As he approached Jerusalem at the beginning of what would be remembered as “Holy Week”, Jesus planned his entry into the city. It was an entry filled with symbolism. Great crusaders made their parades into high drama. They paraded with their armies into the city. Historians tell us that Alexander the Great conquered Jerusalem in 332 BC and entered the city on a magnificent stallion, a war horse. Jesus, in contrast, entered Jerusalem on a donkey, a humble, servant creature. The crowds cheered and spread branches on the road in front of Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem. They shouted, “**Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**”

Luther commented on this text by saying, “**This Gospel wants to entice us to faith, above all else... Look at him! He rides no stallion, which is a war animal, and he comes not with fearful pomp and power, but sits on a donkey, which is not a war animal but which is ready for burdens of work that will help human beings. Thereby he shows that he does not come to terrify people, to drive or oppress them, but to help them, to carry their burdens and take them on himself.**”

People down through the ages have joined the parade as it passed by. Men and women, young and old, people of every color, every culture have been drawn to this parade. They see in Jesus, who leads the parade, the one in whom there is HOPE, one who will give MEANING to life and one who will SAVE. You and I have taken our place in this parade in our generation. We do so knowing that this is a parade that leads through death to life.

The crowds that thronged to see Jesus enter Jerusalem had heard about the power of Jesus to rescue a person from death. They had heard what he had done for Lazarus, and they were eager to stand in the presence of this life-

giver. (Proclamation p. 7) And while it seemed at the end of the week that Jesus had turned out to be a huge disappointment and failure, God had other plans in mind. God's plan was for this parade to continue. It would not end in the bitterness of the cross. That blind alley, the treachery of his enemies, even death itself would not stop the parade....But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

This is the beginning of Holy Week and we once again look back to the final part of that parade route in Jerusalem. As we enter Holy Week we marvel once again at the faithfulness of Jesus who would not be detoured from his course. We see a great cosmic battle unfold. It is nothing less than a battle for the salvation of the world. It is a great cosmic battle with the evil trio of sin, death and the devil on one side, and Jesus, the Son of God on the others side. In the balance hangs the life or the death of the world. The battle has begun. It will lead to a cross and the death of Jesus. We shrink back from the brutal cruelty of the cross and we hide our faces in shame at our guilt which brought Jesus to the cross. And then we lift our eyes to see Jesus, who rides on ahead of us in the parade. And as he looks back at us we can hear him say... "Follow me!"

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you stayed the course even unto death and by your sacrifice we are saved. Give us faith to follow you, trusting in your mercy.
AMEN