

PALM SUNDAY (April 2nd, 2023)
Based on John 12:12-19

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, my son, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved palm branches to honour Him, so we were given palm branches at church today."

The little boy replied, "Aw Shucks! The one Sunday I miss, is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!"

This morning is Palm Sunday - the day, according to all four Gospel writers, where a whole city threw a parade for Jesus. As Jesus rode into the city, the people threw palm branches in anticipation of his coming.

This day marked a time of celebration where Jesus was worshipped and praised.

This day is bittersweet for us because, even as we read of the celebration, we know that Friday is coming - the cross is imminent. We know that many in this same crowd will, within a few short days, exchange their words of praise, for words of condemnation. Those shouts of "Hosanna, Hosanna!" would later transform into "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"

This morning I want to draw our attention to two separate times which focus upon Jesus, yet have two different results.

The great evangelist, Billy Graham, has been quoted many times as saying that the greatest mission field in our countries today, is the people already sitting in our local churches. Many people know what to say in church, how to say it, even how to act there, but when the rubber truly meets that road, without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, there is no salvation- just empty words.

We see a perfect example of this in our Scripture this morning. On this one particular Sunday, Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem, with the people shouting praises to God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. By Friday they were shouting, "Give us Barabbas, we want him. Crucify Jesus, crucify Him."

Why the change? Well, there are many possible reasons, but one simple probability, is that their words did not match their hearts. They possessed a casual, not a committed faith. They had religion, but they missed the person Jesus.

So how can we have a committed faith? How can we be real and sincere, consistent in all that we do? This morning let us consider some keys to a truly committed faith.

The first key, is that a committed faith is not self-centered - it is ***Christ-***centered. This sounds obvious, but we often miss it. In North America today, we tend to say to God, "Hey God, here is my calendar, here is my agenda. Now I can squeeze you in here or here." We pull God out, or turn to Him, only when it is convenient or useful.

In our passage, the people praised Jesus as He passed by, but many of them praised him for different reasons. One was because of his miracles. He had healed the sick, raised the dead. They praised Him because He was serving them.

Another reason was because they saw in Jesus, a way to be politically delivered from the Romans - to be set free from Rome as Israel had been set free from Egypt.

Their praise was tempered with the attitude, "OK Jesus, what can you do for me?"

A few days later at the trial, they saw a beaten and disfigured Jesus, a man who no longer looked like a deliverer or a conqueror. Lies quickly began to circulate and the fickle crowd bought into them, quickly changing their position. This man can't do anything for Me, Me, Me...

There is a legend about an ancient village in Spain. The villagers learned that the king would pay a visit! In a thousand years, a king had never come to that village. Excitement grew!

"We must throw a big celebration!"

The villagers all agreed. But it was a poor village, and they had few resources.

Someone came up with a brilliant idea. Since many of the villagers made their own wines, an idea was proposed, for everyone in the village to bring a large cup of their choice wine to the town square.

"We'll pour it into a big vat and offer it to the king for his pleasure! When the king draws wine to drink, it will be the very best he has ever tasted!"

The day before the king's arrival, hundreds of people lined up to make their offering to the honoured guest. They climbed a small stairway, and poured their gift through an opening at the top. Finally, the vat was full!

The King arrived, was escorted to the square, given a silver cup and was asked to draw some wine, which represented the best the villagers had. He placed the cup under the spigot, turned the handle, and then drank the wine, but it was nothing more than water.

You see, every villager reasoned, "I'll withhold my best wine and substitute water. With so many cups of wine in the vat, the king will never know the difference!"

The problem was, of course, that everyone thought the same thing, and the king was greatly dishonoured as a result.

Today, Palm Sunday 2023, let's choose to honour our great King, Jesus Christ, by giving Him our very best, withholding nothing, giving him our all.

A second key, is that a committed faith is relationship driven. Many of those who gathered to throw their coats and palm branches onto the street and who shouted praises, did so because it was the popular thing to do at the time. At that one brief moment, it became trendy. Perhaps some began doing it with sincere motives, but some did it because others were doing it. Later, at the trial, shouting crucify Him because the trendy thing to do. The crowd opted to make a mass murderer their hero, when they shouted, "We want Barabbas."

In our own lives, a committed faith comes only through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, one where every day is fresh and new, as He personally directs our steps.

A third Key, is that committed faith is not swayed or blocked by our personal trials and crises. At the parade it was trendy to offer praise. Everyone was doing it. But at the trial, to speak out for Jesus was risky, possibly even life threatening.

Many of us come to Jesus expecting most things in our lives will go well – perhaps a few slightly bad times, but not too much of that. So, when the bottom drops out for us, we often ask God why, thinking it is not supposed to happen this way. If our faith is based on **our** situations or circumstances, it will never be committed - it will always be casual.

So often, having attended a Christian event in a packed auditorium, where the praises for God rocked the entire arena, I've thought on the return trip home, how easy it is to experience such a high in the midst of all the excitement, but tomorrow we face the hard tasks. The world is not always praising, in fact, our world is often mocking, laughing and even angry.

A committed faith takes the good with the bad. All we are ever promised, is that during both good times and bad, Jesus will never leave us, nor forsake us. He will always stand with us.

One final story - A little girl, while walking in a garden, noticed a particularly beautiful flower. She admired its beauty and enjoyed its fragrance.

"It's so pretty!" she exclaimed.

As she gazed on it, her eyes followed the stem down to the soil in which it grew.

"This flower is too pretty to be planted in such dirt!" she cried.

So, she pulled it up by its roots and ran to the water tap to wash away the soil. It was not long until the flower wilted and died.

When the gardener saw what the little girl had done, he exclaimed, "You have destroyed my finest plant!"

"I'm sorry, but I didn't like it in that dirt," she said.

The gardener replied, "I chose that spot and mixed the soil, because I knew that only there could it grow to be a beautiful flower."

God has placed us exactly where we are. We must trust Him. In the trusting, we will eventually see that He is using our pressures, trials, and difficulties, to bring us to a new degree of spiritual beauty.

True contentment comes when we accept what God is doing, and thank Him for it. As we approach this 'Holy Week', where Jesus suffered so incredibly for us; in a week where our sins - past, present, and future -were the **real** nails that would pierce his hands and feet, let's examine our priorities a bit more closely. This morning, is our faith casual or committed? Doesn't Jesus deserve total control of our life? Doesn't He deserve our willingness to develop a more personal relationship with Him?

Bruce Gaitsch penned a wonderful hymn which seems to capture the true meaning of what we should be willing to risk, for a Saviour who has risked everything for us.

All to Jesus I surrender.
All to Him I freely give.
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.
I surrender all, I surrender all
All to Thee, my blessed Saviour
I surrender all. AMEN