



THE UNFOGETTABLE PARADE

JOHN 12:12-19

Ticker tape parades used to be common. We used to honor our heroes and heroines with giant spectacles. Celebrities would ride in a convertible down the massive canyons of steel and glass.

Baton twirling young ladies and bands playing rousing Sousa marches led the parade. Tons of confetti, streamers, balloons and ticker tape cascaded down on them like a waterfall. It was very exciting.

2000 years ago Jesus was given a parade. It was Passover time in Jerusalem. As many as 2.5 million people crowded the narrow streets of the holy city. From the distance there came a noise—a kind of rhythmic, staccato chant growing louder and louder.

People stopped talking and turned toward the sound. “Hosanna. Hosanna. Hosanna.” It was more like a cheer than a chant.

As the procession got closer people began to push and shove to see what it was all about. The hosanna’s got louder and louder, reverberating against the stone walls and street.

A man running ahead of the procession was yelling, “Jesus of Nazareth is coming. The Prophet is coming. The man who raises the dead is coming. Hurry, Jesus is coming.”

Dad’s hoisted their children to their shoulders. Teenagers climbed trees lining the streets to get a better view. Everyone wanted to get a glimpse of this strange prophet they had heard about. What they saw was totally unexpected—there was Jesus, serenely sitting on the back of a small, white donkey, slowly moving down the street. He was the center of attention. All around him was chaos, but he was calm.

You could hear the whooshing of palm fronds as they were placed in front of the donkey’s hooves. Some of the watchers took off their coats and cloaks and spread them before Jesus. It was an incredible scene. It was an unforgettable parade? Who was at the parade that day?

1. The bystanders

People from all segments of society were there, many simply innocent bystanders—travelers and pilgrims in Jerusalem for Passover.

Perhaps they came early that morning to shop in the marketplace. Maybe they planned a family picnic on the Mount of Olives or in the Garden of Gethsemane.

They had never seen Jesus before and did not recognize him now. They knew nothing of what was to come. They just simply got caught up in the historical moment.

They were awed by the majesty of the moment. It was more than the crowds, the chanting, and the chaos. It was the man at the center of it all that drew them. It was the Christ.

In his face they saw compassion; they saw the face of a friend. They were enthralled by his countenance, and in that moment many want what he has. And they drop everything to follow him.

2. The poor

Also at the parade were the poor. You could always find the poor near Jesus. They tagged along wherever Jesus went. It was the penniless that sang “Hosanna” the loudest.

They loved Jesus, and why not! Jesus had given them the one thing the world would never grant them—hope.

Hope of a better today filled with forgiveness, grace and mercy. The hope of a brighter tomorrow of an eternal home where mansions line streets paved with gold.

They were outcast by their society, downtrodden by the wealthy and despised by the ruling class. But Jesus gave them hope of a new day, a new beginning, a new start, a new life.

Jesus identified with them. It was the poor in the crowd who blanketed the road with their coats and robes, even though they didn’t have another to spare.

In laying their worn and tattered cloaks on the ground, they were humbling themselves, becoming poor in spirit, knowing they were spiritually bankrupt. Their options were gone. On the road that day they were given hope and life for the future.

3. The Zealots

There were Zealots in the crowd also. The Zealots hated the despicable Romans. They despised the arrogance of the ruling Roman government. They hated the pagan Roman practices

and beliefs, their gods and goddesses and their debauchery.

They carried sharp, razor-like daggers in their belts. If given a chance, they would slip behind a Roman and slit his throat and be gone before anyone realized what happened or who had done it. Zealots were the original terrorists.

They had been watching Jesus. In him they saw the opportunity to be free from the tyranny of the Romans. Jesus could be their liberator. He could lead them in a fight for freedom against the Romans who occupied and dominated their land.

Jesus would be their conquering king, their ruling monarch. So they welcomed Jesus with palm fronds—an open invitation for him to be the restorer and ruler of Israel.

They were ready to do battle. If Jesus would just give the word they would fight to the death against the hated Romans.

But there was a problem—Jesus was riding on a donkey. A conquering king would ride a majestic stallion—a symbol of victory, not a donkey—a symbol of peace.

Jesus was offering peace. They wanted war. They wanted a revolution, not redemption. They desired deliverance from the hated Romans, not freedom from sin.

Jesus never gave the order. Yet some of the Zealots realized that their destructive ways had not brought on the desired changes they had sought. Some saw in Jesus the true revolution—the revolution of peace.

And these few pulled their knives from their belts, dropping them to the hardened packed dirt street below. They, too, entered the procession behind Jesus. Now they were ready to fight, but not a war of hatred and violence, but a battle for love and peaceful nonviolence.

4. The intolerant

The intolerant were also present in the crowds that day. The powerful Pharisees stood back with their ever-watchful eyes glaring at Jesus.

They were the narrow-minded, prejudiced, intolerant, religious folks with their noses stuck up in the air. They had been watching Jesus and they didn't like what they were seeing.

By and large, throughout his ministry, Jesus avoided large crowds whenever he could. He refused to take the power-orientated, domineering stance of other contemporary leaders.

But on this day, the day we call Palm Sunday, Jesus put on the symbols of Old Testament prophets. He declared, in no uncertain terms, by his posture and bearing, "I am the King."

He even picked the day, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which celebrated the Jews deliverance from bondage in Egypt. The exposure was perfect.

Jesus picked this day to force the issue of his whole reason for coming to earth—the redemption of humankind.

His triumphant entry into Jerusalem was the catalytic agent that aroused the anger of the religious establishment, setting the stage for the greatest event in human history—the death and resurrection of the Christ.

The Pharisees understood the symbolism. That's why they commanded Jesus to tell his disciples to stop calling him a king. But Jesus' voice rang out and said, "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (Lk. 19:39-40) Ever wonder about those stones?

The stones Jesus referred to were carried by the Pharisees. They were the size of baseballs. The Pharisees used them to stone people who did not keep the law or adhere to their doctrine.

They loved to hurl rocks at anyone with whom they found fault. The rocks they carried in their hands were the ones with which they wanted to stone Jesus, but didn't have the guts.

Do you know any rock throwers? You know those people who love to find mistakes in church bulletins and fault in their neighbor's lives.

The ones who are first to complain, to criticize, and to condemn. They nit-pick, point out mistakes, second guess decisions and find a cloud in every silver lining.

Rock throwing critics gain power through criticism. They snuff out dreams and destroy aspirations.

Yet, a few of the Pharisees dropped their stones as the message of Jesus pierced their hearts. They dropped their stones to follow Jesus. The stones cry out of the power of Christ to change a life.

5. The passionate

Also in the crowd that day were the Passionate and trusting—people passionate about Jesus because of what he had done for them. They jumped up and down and cheered and screamed their praises.

On one side there was Bartimaeus, the blind man Jesus healed just the week before at Jericho, only 20 miles down the road. He no longer needed someone to lead him around. He could see his beloved Healer just fine, thank you.

Up ahead was the man who was lame for 38 years and lay by the Sheep Pool in Jerusalem, waiting for an angel to heal him. Jesus came and touched him, and the man no longer needed his crutches. He was jumping up and down for joy.

And over there was the man who once had a withered hand until Jesus came along and healed him. He no longer had a need for his dirty, puss-filled bandages. Now he could help others.

Yonder was Lazarus, tears of joy streaming down his cheeks because he who was dead was now alive to see this wonderful parade. Besides him are his sisters Mary and Martha, also crying for joy, thankful to Jesus that their brother was still with them.

No wonder they cry and dance, shout and sing, smile and laugh. The One riding on the donkey is the Healer, the Miracle Worker. Their lives had been transformed forever. They cannot contain their joy and excitement.

This truly was one parade they would never forget. The One who made the day so special is alive today. Have you felt the healing touch of Jesus?

What city even today would not be shaken by Jesus' entry into it? Imagine Jesus entering New York, Belgrade, Washington, or even Albuquerque.

Oh, I'm sure we'd welcome him with our hosannas—at first, anyway. We'd line the streets and strike up the band and have a grand parade right down Central Avenue.

But I'm equally sure that, by the end of the week, we'd have killed him too. Why? Because the Kingdom Jesus came to establish still threatens the kingdoms of this world—maybe your kingdom and mine—the kingdoms where greed, power, and lust rule instead of grace, mercy, and peace.

Has your life been changed by the wonder-working power of Jesus? If so, you know what Bartimaeus felt, what the crippled man felt, and what the wounded man felt.

When you trust your life to Jesus and receive the gift of eternal life, you know what Lazarus felt, for you, too, were dead and now are alive.

Application:

Jesus came as a man, overcame death, healed the broken, restored sight to the blind and calls for you to join the parade today. He'll take the brokenness of your life and put it back together again. He'll take the trash of your sin and make you clean and pure. He'll take your spiritual poverty and make you eternally rich. He'll take your lifeless today and give you a resurrection tomorrow. He is the only hope of the world, and the hope of your life.

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