

A Sermon for DaySpring

By Burt Burleson

“Curbside and Rooftop”

John 12: 12-19

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Jesus has a way of showing up... sometimes unexpectedly, sometimes uninvited... rarely on cue... least not our cue.

He shows up with a kind of invasion of what we need, not necessarily what we want. But what we need. Jesus invades and when he does he brings with him the realm of God... always...

another Kingdom...

a different way of being...

an invasion of truth and life.

Called the Kingdom of God.

On that first Palm Sunday, there was an invasion. Nothing resembling “shock and awe” but an invasion nonetheless. A new reality was ushered into Jerusalem... bouncing up and down on the back of a little donkey.

Like it or not...

Ready or not...

Jesus had come to town.

And it's a big town... so many folks there for all sorts of reasons... not the least of which was Passover. ... Lot's of people were there on that day with plenty of different reactions to this invasion.

People are packed into to Jerusalem and now Jesus is in their midst... And for the sake of finding ourselves in this crowd and in this story, lets take a look at some of these folks who found themselves part of the first Palm Sunday.

The most obvious... prominent folks in this picture are these frenzied, enthusiastic, palm-waving, cloak dropping fans... who are up on the curbside screaming their hosannas... and who can blame them?

Jesus had just recently raised someone from the dead and that always has a way of raising expectations. Not only that but he'd...

Fed a couple thousand folks with a little boy's lunch...

Healed a crazy man in a cemetery...

Turned a tax collector into a philanthropic saint...

And turned some old water into fine wine.

When Jesus shows up... strange and great things happen... so these folks are just beside themselves up there on the curbside... palm branches in hand... laying their cloaks down... and screaming hosanna at the top of their lungs.

“**Hosanna**” it actually means “**save us.**” And they're unabashedly shouting to this would-be savior. And a part of me envies them. I'm not one to stand on the curbside and scream... more reserved and come by it naturally.

These folks have so much heart and emotion and they're so freed up... I like them, don't you. And even if you're not the hosanna type, it's not hard to imagine yourself joining this crowd.

I can see myself there...

Jesus is coming to town...

this miracle-working savior.

I might not be screaming "save me" with palm branch in hand but I'd have a list in my hand of just what I need Jesus to do for me. Just like they did on that first Sunday.

Someone has a crippled child up there on the curbside. **"Hosanna, Jesus."** Someone else is so tired of being poor and hungry and jobless. **"Hosanna."** There's another at the curbside, palm branch in hand, and a million questions in her head.

"Hosanna."

And some who wants the oppressed raised up and now.

And there was a tidal wave in the Mediterranean and folks are screaming hosanna for its victims.

There are plenty of them who want Jesus to fix things politically. They want Jesus to fix the culture and make things right morally... and militarily too. And you can't blame them for their expectations. Jesus is coming into Jerusalem just like others had. Their waving palm branches and thinking, **"It's our time now."**

In John's version of the story... Jesus grabs the donkey after he sees the crowd. Perhaps it's a way of trying to say to those who have ears to hear... eyes to see... This is not what you think.

And theirs is a thin faith, isn't it? There hasn't been any real reflection on what it means to receive Christ and this new invading kingdom. It really is about them...

"Hosanna... save me... and save me in the way I want it."

They're so close to the curbside and I can't blame them. I'd be up there too with my list... but all of us up there need to take a step back, don't we. We can't just grab a handful of simple answers and scream hosanna. Our palm waving is often a selfish and unthoughtful praise. It's so emotional... and the vulnerability of faith that is only in the heart is that is shallow.

And when our miracle doesn't come... we yell, **"Give us Barabus all too easily."** Such is faith on the curbside.

But there's also faith on the rooftop. That's where I picture these Pharisees... not really a part of the parade... more above it and removed from it. They observe... that's what they do. It's their job and calling.

And before you go hearing that bad guy Darth Vader music in your head... know this... we would like these guys and respect them. And I have to be honest and say we have an awful lot in common with them... least I do.

They've spent a lifetime studying the scriptures. They know chapter and verse. They've got Bible Drill trophies on their shelves from church training when they were kids.

We'd love these folks... they go to church all the time. Even go to Tuesday night visitation. They're active in their faith... they're committed... they believe... they're serious about it. It's the most important thing in their lives.

No Darth Vader music playing here. These folks are the conservatives in that Palm Sunday crowd and goodness knows some of us would really like that. They're charged with preserving what is. They have family values.

Some of us would really like these guys because they spend hours and hours talking theology and debating and reading.

They slice and dice...

Frame and reframe...

Deconstruct and reconstruct.

And you have to admire someone like that. Don't be too hard on them... we need folks like this and folks like this make our church's thrive... they teach our students.

But... when invasions come along... new thinking... ideas... some of them get nervous and usually find themselves on the rooftop and they absolutely cannot receive this new realm from way up there.

That's the vulnerability when we get so centered in our thoughts and values... in our heads... in our doctrines... and we're dead. We tend to keep everything at arms length... it does not get near enough to impact us. That's what happens with faith on the rooftop.

Most of those on the rooftops resisted and missed this invasion... as did most of those on the curbside. Both groups... frenzied excited fans and fearful, protective critics... they missed it. One group, not deep enough... the other, not close enough.

But there is another group there on that first Palm Sunday. The disciples are there, and they are walking alongside Jesus. For sure, an interesting moment for them... very mixed...

“Look at all these folks, maybe this won't end like Jesus said.”

“But then again... when have you ever known Jesus to be wrong.”

And as much as they're bound to enjoy all the cheering, they can see right through the fickle and unreflective faith of those screaming hosanna on the curbside. And they can almost feel the condemnation falling on them from the roof top. They don't fit in either place.

They aren't like the palm wavers...

they aren't following Jesus just to get something...

some pass through the pearly gates even.

They know that following Jesus has something to do with being like him... not just getting their felt needs met... and their eternity secure. They are beside Jesus in order to be like Jesus.

But, they aren't like those on the rooftops either. They are thinking and learning and reflecting... but not at a distance. These folks have said yes... that's why they're in this parade... walking next to Jesus.

With him... they've said yes... they've made a decision...

They have bet their lives on this... They have faith. There's plenty of heart, curbside... Plenty of head, rooftop. Faith is beside Jesus on the road. Jesus as he makes his way to the cross.

The disciples are the only ones who get this invasion. But they only get it because they have faith enough to journey with Jesus. And where would that take them? We know what's coming, don't we? It's not picnic getting in on this parade.

There are more confrontations with his enemies. They watch as he's anointed, prepared for death. They quarrel about who's number one and number two.

Having faith takes them into what is real. It's a week and a life where they know great temptation... there's betrayal and denial and abandonment. It isn't abstract or theoretical. There're feet washed. This is bread broken... a cup drained.

It's a week and a life and a faith where they cannot remain "unwounded." There's agony in this week, letting go and ecstasy. That's what the week holds for these people of faith who have stepped out beside Jesus.

John says that only after Jesus was glorified did they realize what was taking place. Glorification is one word John used to say two things. When he is lifted up in glory John is referring both to his crucifixion and his ascension.

So, these faithful disciples, walked beside Jesus... they had made a commitment... It wasn't shallow faith curbside faith. It wasn't **"give me my miracle and make my life good."**

Nor was it rooftop faith that begin in knowing it all. They didn't understand... it didn't make sense.

They had way more questions than answers. They walked into Jerusalem, not with a doctrine but with a person... with their friend and teacher.

Understanding came after following. Seeing came after commitment. Later they knew... with the cross in view... through the lens of that event, they saw and understood.

Well, it's the beginning of Holy Week. Are you in this Palm Sunday crowd somewhere today?

Maybe here on the curbside with lots of heart and enthusiasm and a list a mile long of all you wish God would do. I'm not judging you... I'm also shouting "save me" ... I've got my list too...

But maybe we should drop them (or at least fold them up and put them in some pocket) and just step out into this parade route headed into this dark mystery and there beside Jesus go deep... deep... deeper into faith.

Or are you a rooftop dweller? You got God and the Christian life all figured out. You know who the good guys are and who's dangerous... and who you should listen to and who you should avoid.

You have your doctrines all nailed down...

Or maybe not... maybe you're just up on the rooftop playing with them, but on the rooftop, judging Jesus at arms length, all the same.

Never committing ... never risking. Rooftops are comfortable tombs. Maybe it's time to get down into the parade next to him in an act of faith. And walk into this Paschal Mystery in hopes of seeing truth from the other side of it.

It is Holy Week. Our savior has come into our midst. There is an invasion. The infinite is among us. Where will you be? Observing? There are curbsides. There are rooftops. And plenty of places ride beside Jesus on this journey.

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