

**PASSION / PALM SUNDAY   APRIL 17, 2011   CYCLE "A"**

**TITLE:   AFTER THE CHEERING CAME THE JEERING**

**READINGS:   Isaiah 50:4-9a, Ps. 31:9-16, Phil. 2:5-11, Matt. 27:11-54**

On Palm Sunday April 9, 1865 Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant, General of the Union Army at the Appomattox Court House in Virginia. This surrender ended the bloodiest war ever fought on American soil. It tore our nation apart for it set state against state brother and sister against brother and sister. Five days later on Good Friday, April 14, 1865 America's most revered president, Abraham Lincoln, was shot by John Wilkes Booth in Ford's Theatre. On Palm Sunday there was cheering and rejoicing because the terrible Civil War had ended. But on Good Friday just five days later the cheering and rejoicing ceased for Abraham Lincoln became the first U.S. President to be assassinated.

We began our celebration today singing Hosannas to our Messiah and King as we reminded ourselves with our own procession with Palms of the great day in honor of Jesus our Messiah and King as he entered Jerusalem with the crowds cheering him and waving Palm branches and throwing their cloaks on the road in front of him. In shouting Hosanna they were in effect saying: "We acknowledge you as our Messiah and King, you have come to save us, alleluia!" Today we have officially begun Holy Week, rejoicing with the triumphant Christ entering Jerusalem, but knowing that the tragedy of Good Friday is only five days away, for we know that after the cheering comes the jeering.

No wonder Holy Week moves from cheering to jeering, from triumph to tragedy. The expectations of the people had been dashed. They had longed for change as they looked forward to a conquering hero, but change was nowhere in sight. Even Jesus' disciples expected him to exercise his kingship by vanquishing their enemies. The two disciples on the Emmaus road tell the resurrected Jesus, who walks along with them, yet whom they do not recognize, that they had hoped that this Jesus was the one to redeem Israel. "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." Lk.24:21. When Jesus appears to his disciples before his ascension, the disciples are still asking, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6. They wanted Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom and to make them his lieutenants. And so many of the crowd turned against him. It

should not be surprising that some of those who sang their sweet hosannas on Palm Sunday were shouting “Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!” on Good Friday.

Here’s the obvious question for us: would it be any different today? How willing would we be to follow a fallen hero? Would we welcome Christ into our community, into our family, even into our church if he didn’t stack up didn’t meet our expectations? Fleming Rutledge wrote a book titled, The Bible and the New York Times. She tells the story of a woman in her church who would not come to church on Palm Sunday because her church enacted the scene in Pilate’s court yard on Palm Sunday. This woman couldn’t stand being asked to shout “Crucify him! Crucify him!” “I just can’t do it,” the lady explained. Rutledge says, “I always felt very sad for her. She missed the whole point. She could have come to church every other Sunday of the year and she still would have missed the whole point...It was very important to her to think of herself as one of the righteous. She could not confront her own darkness. How sad this is. If she but knew it, there is great power in the act of repentance.” We need to confront our own darkness. We need to confront our own need for repentance. We, too, need to cry out at the top of our lungs “Crucify him! Crucify him!” for he died for our sins, our transgressions, our darkness.

While the cross of Christ reveals the evil humanity is capable of, it also reveals the love of which God is capable. Ultimately the story of Holy Week is one of cheering and jeering, of triumph and tragedy. We cheer and rejoice today, then journey to the cross on Good Friday, knowing that Christ’s victory over sin and death is very close indeed. This is why the cross is so precious to us believers. It calls us to repentance, but it also represents God’s grace which covers all our sins.

They cheered Jesus on Sunday and on Friday they hung him on a tree. But God had the last word. God took that tree and made it a symbol of our salvation from the forces of sin and death. Even though they heralded him as Messiah and King on Palm Sunday and cried out “Crucify him!” on Friday, we thank our God for that final triumphant victory of our Savior on Easter Sunday. If we truly and sincerely walk with Jesus to his cross and dying, we will again most certainly shout our Hosannas and Hallelujahs at his rising! **Amen.**

**Pastor Barney**

## **THE OLD RUGGED CROSS**

Edward Grinnan had to place his mother into an assisted living home after Alzheimers made it impossible for her to live alone. She'd only been there a week when he got a call from the supervisor. "I hate to tell you this," said the supervisor, "but your mom's been swiping things from other people's rooms. Socks, candy bars, T-shirts. Nothing big, except that one lady's cross is missing." Grinnan could scarcely believe this. His mom was the most honest person he knew. She once drove twenty miles back to a store where the clerk had given her too much change.

The next time he visited her, he gently chided her for the pilfering. "You've got to cut that out, Mom," he said, sitting with her in the lunchroom. "Did you take that cross?" She shook her head, her curly gray hair bouncing. "Sure about that?" he pressed. His mother turned away, then reached into her purse and pulled out the small silver cross. She set it down on the table and stared at it. "I wasn't trying to steal," was all the explanation she gave. Later he turned over the cross to the supervisor, apologizing. "Don't don't," she said, "your mom's a charmer. She's just trying to hang on to the things that mean the most to her." The next time Grinnan came to the assisted living center he brought his mom a small silver cross. She stopped stealing after that.

Eventually they had to move Grinnan's mom to a facility where she could receive more care and where, of course, she charmed everyone. "She even led prayers on Friday morning. She had forgotten almost everything else, yet the prayers came to her lips as if she had freshly committed them to memory. And when she died, the saddest people of all were the people she prayed with on Friday mornings with that little silver cross he gave her clutched in her hand."

Her story gives new meaning to that line in the old gospel song, "I will cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it someday for a crown."