

## **“WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM JESUS?”**

**Psalm 118; Matthew 21:1-11**

**April 17, 2011 Palm Sunday**

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The weather had been warm and dry. People threw their cloaks to cover the roadway in order to keep the dust down. And they waited. Word had spread from mouth to mouth that the famous youngish Galilean rabbi would be coming into Jerusalem that day: the one who taught, and healed, did signs and wonders. But it's not as if there were a designated time for this parade. Sometime that day. The people were accustomed to such lack of precision. His route to the city took him through Jericho, so Jesus would have entered Jerusalem by the road coming in from the East.

By mid-morning, the first seekers were out and waiting. By mid-day, the sides of the road were crowded—hundreds, maybe thousands, jockeying for position. You can bet that some were smart enough to bring food and other wares to sell. Strangers murmured to other strangers as elbows bumped, or a carelessly placed foot landed on someone else's toes. The enticing smells of grilled meats and fresh bread mixed with the less savory animal dung, and too many bodies in close proximity. Excitement pulsed through the crowd, a palpable thing. Jesus was coming. Neighbors and strangers told stories and exchanged gossip, speculated on the event to come, their speech punctuated by searching glances up the road, watching for the first signs of the rabbi's coming. Most of them didn't know what Jesus looked like. Most of them had no idea with how large a company he would be traveling. You have to believe there were false starts, murmurs then shouts of excitement that died away when those who knew shook their heads. Not this one. Not yet.

So who were these people? What were they looking for this day? With Jesus' reputation as a healer, you can bet that many came hoping for a touch or a glance, some direction given that would make them whole. Others had a more political agenda. Was this the guy who could lead a successful insurrection against the power of Rome? Some hoped; others feared; still others were plotting, trying to decide how best Jesus could be used. Pharisees and zealots, the Jewish hierarchy side by side with rousers of rabble. There were genuine spiritual seekers, like the rich young man from last week, and those of shallower intent. They were just there for the show, whatever it might be. And there were those who came simply to celebrate. They had already met Jesus, and in meeting him, their lives had been changed, and for them, this day's opportunity brought them simple delight.

What's important to know is that this crowd was a mixed bag of those wanting to serve, and those wanting to be served; those who came to see and those who showed up to be seen. And when Jesus finally arrived and made his way ever closer to Jerusalem's gates, he saw the crowds gathered there, and he knew it for the mixed lot it was. Some would chalk that up to divine precognition, others just common sense. But as Jesus rode through the people, he knew them

just as they were, with their agendas and mixed feelings, and differing levels of spiritual interest and maturity. He knew them all, and he loved them like he knew them, just as they were.

This morning's Palm Sunday procession differs in detail from that morning long ago—we have a carpeted floor instead of a dusty road to walk on, and no one had ever heard of eco-palms in Jesus' day! The details are different, but the crowd—us and those along the Jerusalem road that day long ago—we are eerily alike. We come to this place this morning, all of us, wanting something from Jesus. If we didn't want, we wouldn't be here. Like those twenty centuries ago, some of us need healing: we need healing from anxieties and addiction, from old pains and new wounds. And we hope to find it in a look or a touch, in some new perception that will refocus or remake us. Some of us want that from Jesus. Others come to the church—this church, other churches—because of politics, broadly defined. They are looking for the places where their agendas and Jesus's align. If I've got Jesus on my side, well that's clout. And it's not necessarily a bad thing, but as in earlier days, it's always a tricky thing. Over the centuries, people have built orphanages in Jesus' name and, with an equal sense of righteousness, slaughtered marginalized people in Jesus' name. We who bring our political and social agendas to church, we do well to be careful to discern whether we remake Jesus to suit our needs or remake ourselves to serve his. That's just a preacher's aside, by the way. What matters here is that for both good and ill, there are always those on the Palm Sunday road, with one eye searching for Jesus and the other perusing the agenda. And then there are those who look to Jesus with the fragile hope of new discovery: Can this way, this path, this community be the way to live my faith, to fill the emptiness of my soul? What a blessing. And there are those for whom Jesus is an old love—a light that has burned bright even in their darkest days for as long as they can remember. A different kind of blessing. And, finally, there are those who are still seeking, and are not sure either what they have found or what they will find. But they are looking and so they come. And just like the parade so long ago, Jesus is here for this parade. And he sees who we are and what we are, what we bring and what we need, and he loves us with all the mixedness that brings us here today or any day.

If Easter is the ultimate celebration of God's power, God's divinity, then Palm Sunday is the full celebration of God's knowledge and God's acceptance of our humanity. Here is not the bursting joy of the empty tomb, but here should be for us all the blessed security for which we yearn. We are known and we are loved. We are known completely, and still we are loved. Breathe in. Breathe out. You are known and you are loved. And so you need no longer worry that you are not good enough, or that you are not faithful enough; that you are not sure enough, or courageous enough, or knowledgeable enough, or spiritual enough. Enough with enough! You are human, and for some reason of your soul's desire you want to see Jesus, to know Jesus, to find Jesus. You tell me the words. You are here today, and therefore you belong here today, and you should be assured or reassured here today that the One to whom and for whom we wave our palms, the Jesus entering Jerusalem, the one who later this week will travel Calvary's hill: he was not naïve, not taken in or fooled. He loved us in all the fragility and mixedness of our humanity. And he

loves us still. I can think of no better reason to wave a palm, and to risk looking foolish doing it enthusiastically. Jesus is riding towards us once again to deliver the message that we are known and we are loved. Hosannah in the highest. Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord. Hosannah! Thanks be to God. Amen.