

“When the Cheering Stops”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – April 10, 2022 – Palm Sunday

Luke 19:28-40

One time back in the early 1800s, Napoleon and his army were moving through Switzerland. And everywhere they went, Napoleon was greeted with thunderous applause: "Long live the King! Vive la France! Hail to the Emperor Napoleon!"

But Napoleon didn't seem too excited about what was going on. So, a supporter said to him, "Isn't it great to hear the roar of the crowd; the support of the people?"

And Napoleon replied, "The same people that are cheering for me today would cheer just as loudly at my execution."

I think what Napoleon was trying to say is that people are fickle. One day, you're their hero. The next day, you could be a total zero. It's amazing how fast the roar of the crowd can turn against you.

That's what Jesus finds out during Holy Week. On Palm Sunday, the crowd was behind him all the way: "HOSANNA! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD! HAIL TO THE KING OF KINGS! HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!"

But five days later, the same people who were praising him up and down are now saying, "CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM! ANYONE WHO CLAIMS TO BE A KING OPPOSES CAESAR! HE MUST BE PUT TO DEATH!"

I've always wondered about that. How could these people praise the Lord so joyfully on Palm Sunday . . . and then do a complete turn-around five days later? What happened?

I think a lot of the people cheering for Jesus on Palm Sunday simply got caught up in the excitement of the event. They weren't ready to commit their lives to Jesus. They weren't ready to put their necks on the line for Him. They weren't ready to die for him.

And that's why Jesus weeps over Jerusalem in verses 41-44. Because it breaks his heart that the very people that he loves won't love him back the same way. They will not commit to Him.

In the church, I call people like that carnival Christians. They enjoy the fun. They get caught up in the emotion of cheering for Jesus. But when it comes down to taking a stand for Christ in their personal lives, forget about it. When it comes down to obeying Christ, no way. When it comes to being part of the body of Christ, “no thank you,” they are too busy with their lives.

I think it takes real guts to be a Christian. To swim against the stream of society. To stay true to the Lord and Scripture even when it means sacrificing a little convenience. And a little popularity.

You ever see the movie "A League of their Own?" about that women's baseball league? There's a scene in it when Geena Davis' character fights with her sister. And she decides to quit the league.

And as she's packing her things, the manager comes up to her. And says, "Why are you leaving?" But she doesn't answer. "I SAID, WHY ARE YOU LEAVING???" "Because I don't like the game anymore. It just got too hard."

And the manager says "It's supposed to be hard. If it was easy, everyone would do it. The hard is what makes it great!"

That's also true of Christianity. The hard is what makes it great. Because it forces you to grapple with real issues. "Am I going to be truly committed to Jesus Christ? Or am I just in it for the emotional fulfillment I get on Sunday?"

Paul says in Acts 14:22 that *"WE MUST GO THROUGH MANY HARDSHIPS TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD."* And if anyone should know what he's talking about, it's Paul. Listen to what he says in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29: *"I HAVE WORKED MUCH HARDER, BEEN IN PRISON MORE FREQUENTLY, BEEN FLOGGED MORE SEVERELY, AND BEEN EXPOSED TO DEATH AGAIN AND AGAIN. FIVE TIMES I RECEIVED FROM THE JEWS THE FORTY LASHES MINUS ONE. THREE TIMES I WAS BEATEN WITH RODS, ONCE I WAS STONED, THREE TIMES I WAS SHIPWRECKED. I HAVE LABORED AND TOILED AND HAVE OFTEN GONE WITHOUT SLEEP; I HAVE KNOWN HUNGER AND THIRST AND HAVE OFTEN GONE WITHOUT FOOD; I HAVE BEEN COLD AND NAKED. BESIDES EVERYTHING ELSE, I FACE DAILY THE PRESSURE OF MY CONCERN FOR ALL THE CHURCHES."*

In other words, Christianity can be a very demanding way of life. And I think once the Palm Sunday crowd realized this, that's when they said, "That's enough. This is where we get off. Crucify Him!"

Ann Weems wrote a book called, Kneeling in Jerusalem. And, in the book she says some things that reveal the carnival Christian that lies inside each of us. This is what she says: "In a frenzy of celebration we gladly focus on Jesus. We generously throw down our coats. We lay down our palms in his path. And we shout praises loud enough to make a Pharisee complain. The parade is a lot of fun. But it's in between parades that we don't do so well. We don't do so well from Sunday to Sunday. We seem to forget all about our hosannas between parades. The stones will have to shout. Because we won't."

I think she makes a good point. It's easy to praise the Lord and look spiritual on Sunday, but where's your Christianity during the week when people really need to see it? Where do you truly stand with God?

My point is that you can't base the quality of your Christian experience solely by what you do in church on Sunday. Unless you are committed to Jesus Christ in your everyday life, it's not going to last. If you are not spending regular time reading your Bible and praying to God, you will never be anything more than a carnival Christian.

Maybe you're thinking, "OK, Shane. How can I stay faithful to Christ during the week? What should I do first? How do I get started?"

The first thing you should do is to start reading the Bible again. They always say that when a baseball team goes into a losing streak, they need to get back to the fundamentals. Making contact with the ball. Base running. Throwing the ball from the outfield to the cutoff man. And some of us need to get back to the fundamentals of the Christian life. And one of those fundamentals happens to be Bible reading.

The next thing you should do is talk to God every day in prayer. *1 Thessalonians 5:17* says "PRAY CONTINUALLY." That doesn't mean you should be on your knees 24 hours a day. 7 days a week. It means being in a spirit of prayer throughout the day. I know some people who pray in the car on the way to work. I know people who pause for a silent prayer in the middle of their day. And that's good. Anything to keep you mindful of God's presence in your life.

The third thing you should do is to use whatever you have to serve God. Some of my favorite characters in *Luke 19* are the owners of the donkey. At first, they think the disciples are stealing it. And so, they say, "What the heck do you guys

think you're doing? That's our animal!" But as soon as they find out that the Lord needs it, they were like, "We're cool with that."

God had opened their hearts. And they were willing to let their animals be used by God for a higher purpose. 1 Peter 4:10 says "USE WHATEVER GIFT YOU HAVE TO SERVE OTHERS."

Your Christianity doesn't have to burn out after a Sunday worship service. You can read the Bible and pray and serve God all week long. Even after the cheering stops.

I want everyone in this room and online to have a personal relationship with Jesus. But I also want you to know that it's more than just the "ra ra ra" of a worship service. It's a lifetime commitment. But it's also the most satisfying commitment you'll ever make. Make this the best Lenten season you've ever had; and give your life to Christ. Welcome Christ into your life with the same joy with which the disciples welcomed Christ into Jerusalem. AMEN.