

ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

REV. JIM CAPPS- APRIL 1, 2012

“TWO PARADES”

JOHN 12:12-24

People of all ages like to go to all kinds of parades. There are celebrative parades such as the inauguration of a president, the wedding of a prince, welcoming home victorious soldiers or a championship team. There are also parades which are very somber and sad like the funeral parade of a fallen hero or leader.

Parades have been a part of the history of these United States since before the Revolutionary War. Do you know what the oldest parade in the United States is? It's Mardi Gras, first taking place in New Orleans in 1857. The next oldest is the Tournament of Roses Parade which began in Pasadena in 1890.

Last year, in April, I experienced Fiesta in San Antonio for the first time. In many ways it's like Mardi Gras, but much more family friendly. It has its roots in the early history of Texas and the Alamo. Believe it or not, there are three major parades in Fiesta. The first one takes place early in Fiesta week in the evening when hundreds of thousands of spectators gather at the Riverwalk for the Texas Cavaliers River Parade. The floats really do float. I was the guest of friends who had sat at that same place in front of the same restaurant for 25 years.

The next was the Battle of Flowers Parade which dates back to 1891 and is the largest parade in the nation run entirely by women. It is several hours long. The final parade is the Fiesta Flambeau Parade dating back to 1948. It has the distinction of being our nation's largest illuminated night parade. I was privileged to see all or a good part of each of these parades and experience people shouting "Viva Fiesta!" and thoroughly enjoying the rich tradition.

In a little less than 2 months, we, here in Indianapolis will celebrate the 500 with a special parade that has become one of the finest in the country. What's your favorite parade? Maybe you watch it in the comfort of your living or family room in the morning on Thanksgiving Day or New Years Day.

Today as we finish this series of messages entitled "Countdown to the Cross," we are going to look at two very different parades taking place in the same city a mere 5 days apart. I think you will agree with me that these were the two most significant parades in human history. Let's turn to an eye witness account of the first of these parades as I read John 12:12-20.

FIRST PARADE- JESUS TRIUMPHANTLY ENTERS JERUSALEM AT THE PASSOVER.

While certainly different from the 500 Festival or the San Antonio Fiesta, the Passover was a huge celebration in Jerusalem each year in the spring time. In the Passover, all good Jews were harkening back in their corporate memory to the last plague in Egypt when the children of Israel were in bondage. In faith, they were to offer a lamb, take its blood and paint it over the doorposts of their living quarters. The death angel would "pass over" and not take the life of the first born in the home where the doorposts had the blood of a lamb painted on them. It was after this horrendous

happening that the Egyptian Pharaoh released Israel making way for the Exodus, one of the great events of Israel's history.

The Passover was one of three festivals compulsory for every Jewish man within 20 miles of Jerusalem. Every good Jew wanted to be in Jerusalem for the Passover at least once in his life. If he lived far from Jerusalem and couldn't make it, his cry would be, "This year here. Next year Jerusalem!" One Jewish historian estimates as many as 2.5 million people in Jerusalem for the Passover.

In the year we just read about, the third year of Jesus' ministry, there was a buzz about the young Galilean Rabbi named Jesus. While everyone knew the religious leaders were out to get Him, would He make an appearance at the festival?

People in the crowds were talking about the way Jesus had raised Lazarus from the tomb where he had been dead for 4 days. Because of His preaching, teaching, and healing, many of those on the road or already in the city thought Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. He could be setting up His kingdom this year. While the Romans were a formidable foe, nothing would be impossible for God's "Anointed One," the Messiah.

Because of the religious leaders deep desire to get rid of this One whom they believed threatened their whole way of life, Jesus' disciples and closest friends feared for His safety. They warned Him to stay away. Thomas expresses their fear when he says in John 11 after Jesus says He is going to Bethany, right outside of Jerusalem, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

All of these facts form an important backdrop for the first parade we are going to look at together.

It was on the day after Mary had anointed Jesus' feet with costly ointment, a foreshadowing of His death, that the news leaked out that Jesus would soon be entering Jerusalem. There must have been a growing sense of anticipation as they awaited His arrival on the Sunday before the Passover.

Last year, about an hour ahead of time, I found a good place to stand to watch the Battle of Flowers Parade in San Antonio. It was fascinating watching people straining to catch a first glimpse of or hear the first sound of the University of Texas marching band. So it must have been as people waited on the pathway from Bethany to Jerusalem, down the Mount of Olives through the Kidron Valley and up into the crowded city.

There had been preparation. It wasn't entirely spontaneous. People had cut palm branches like the ones used when Judas Maccabeus, one of their great heroes came to rededicate the Temple in 164 BC. Palms were also waved to welcome Simon Maccabeus as he returned from conquering the Jerusalem citadel in 142 BC. The people were ready to throw down their cloaks when He came near to give Jesus a kind of "red carpet" welcome.

Jesus was careful to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy in Zechariah 9:9, "Behold your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt." Jesus has His disciples secure the colt of a donkey for Him to ride. While sometimes a military leader or monarch would enter his home city in triumph riding on a stallion and brandishing a sword in shining armor. However, there were times when a great leader would want to come as an agent of peace riding on a donkey, coming in humility. It must also be said that donkeys were considered noble beasts in Jesus' day.

As Jesus, the Messiah, rode in that parade on that first Palm Sunday, He would not be the “national liberator” overthrowing the Romans as many had hoped, especially when they saw that He had raised Lazarus from the dead. Instead, Jesus came as a symbol of humility bringing peace and conquering much more than the Romans. He would do something no one before or since had the power to do. Jesus would conquer sin and death, bringing a lasting peace beyond human understanding. As the Great Reconciler, Jesus would bring peace with God and peace with others around us. The people that day had no idea how revolutionary Jesus really was.

The crowd shouted, “Hosanna,” which meant, “Save us now.” They also shouted from Psalm 118, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!” Little did they know the kind of Savior and King He really was.

As we look into the frenzied almost hysterical crowd, some coming out to meet Him and some walking along with Him, we can spot three groups of people.

- There are the curious who have heard a lot about Jesus and want to see for themselves if history is happening before their very eyes.
- There are those who had been with Him before and believed whole-heartedly that He is Messiah. They believe they are moving toward a moment of fulfillment.
- There are the religious leaders who are more panic-stricken than ever by the parade. This is their worst nightmare come true. Some of them exclaim in utter desperation, “You see, you can do nothing. Look the world has gone after him!”

While we have experienced different parades for all kinds of purposes in various settings, I dare say, none of us has ever experienced a parade like this first parade on Palm Sunday. Can you hear the “Hosannas”? Can you feel the anticipation that is so thick you could cut it with a knife? The celebration is the culmination of centuries of waiting for a deliverer, who would sit on the throne of the Great King David.

IN STARK CONTRAST, THE SECOND PARADE TOOK PLACE ON THE FRIDAY AFTER PALM SUNDAY WHEN JESUS CARRIED HIS CROSS TO GOLGATHA.

The days between the two parades were action-packed and tumultuous. Jesus overturned the tables and chased the money changers from the Temple. The atmosphere further heated up when Jesus spoke vehemently against the religious leaders. The frenzied passion of the masses, treating Jesus like a great conqueror on Palm Sunday, began to fizzle as Jesus did not meet their expectations.

Many of those in the crowds were fickle enough to believe the impassioned words of the religious leaders who had Jesus arrested, illegally tried, and handed over to their hated enemy, the Roman Governor, Pilate. They wanted Jesus dead. Legally, they did not have the authority to execute their lawbreakers. Execution must be left to the Romans, even though they would have taken Jesus out anyway if it weren't for all the people in Jerusalem for the Passover and the possibility of a riot. If Pilate did the dastardly deed, they wouldn't be in danger from either their own masses or the Roman government.

The second parade begins after Pilate is blackmailed by the religious leaders and acquiesces to the shouts from the crowd, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" I dare say some of the shouts came from the same voices who had cried, "Hosanna!" in the first parade.

The second parade snakes its way through the narrow, packed streets of Jerusalem with Jesus and two hardened criminals carrying the crosses on which they will be executed. It is plain to see that the second parade is as tragic as the first parade was triumphant.

Jesus, the same humble king for whom they rolled out the red carpet and waved palm branches is a pathetic even grotesque sight. You would have been shocked, maybe even horrified, if you were standing along a street and the processional came around the corner. His back had been shredded by whips, a crown of thorns had been shoved down on his brow, and he was clearly physically spent. If your eyes met his, he did not have the look of anger or revenge of the two criminals who were in the parade with Him. Rather than exhibiting anger or belligerence about the injustice being done to Him, His eyes were filled with sadness, compassion and love.

As was true of the first parade, people reacted in different ways to Him as it wound through the crowded streets and made its way outside the city toward the "place of the skull" where He would be executed.

- For the curious, there was a mixed reaction. Some were in stunned silence. Others shouted obscenities. Still others spat on or shook their fists at Him.
- For His followers, there was shock, bitter tears, utter amazement and disbelief. There was for many a quiet sense of indignation that they could do this to such a good and decent man who for many of them had changed their lives. He had brought healing and hope and now this is His reward.
- For the religious leaders, they continued to demonstrate a kind of self-righteous indignation as if Jesus were finally getting what He deserved. It must have been difficult to keep from smiling and giving each other the equivalent of today's "high fives." They could breath a deep breathe. The renegade rabbi would no longer be a threat. They could get back to business as usual, their rather slimy status quo.

There are collective gasps as the parade makes unscheduled stops on a couple of occasions as Jesus collapses under the heavy, rough-hewn cross. The whole ordeal has taken its toll on the rugged carpenter. The second time He falls one of the pilgrims to the Passover, a man with dark hued skin from North Africa is conscripted to carry the cross up the steep slope to the final destination.

That's the second parade which our Lord endured out of love for each one of us. Soon He would hang between heaven and earth bridging the chasm between God and humanity.

APPLICATION

There is a sense in which Jesus rides into our midst today just as He did that first Palm Sunday. The center doors swing open and He rides down our center aisle. The big difference between that first parade and today is that He is now the Risen and Reigning Lord.

There is something compelling, yet disturbing about the way He rides down our aisle because His eyes meet each one of us who makes up the crowd. In fact, in many ways, we are a lot like the crowds in both of the parades.

- Some of us may be here today out of curiosity. Maybe we are hoping to observe something special or are looking for some kind of emotional or intellectual experience here today.
- Some of us are like His followers who today fall down and worship Him and tell Him we love Him. He has brought us forgiveness, joy, peace and hope.
- Still others of us, if the truth be known may be threatened by Him. If we really take Him seriously, He might take us to places from which we can never return.
- When His eyes meet yours, in which group are you?

To go a step further, as He rides on in our midst, each of us is confronted with the question- Crown Him? Or, Crucify Him?

- If it's crown Him, with love and humility we accept His forgiveness, affirm or reaffirm Him as Savior, King of Kings, Lord of Lords; with all of our hearts we want to serve Him by reaching out and serving others; like Him, we desire to be a Herald of Hope in every way possible to our world each day.
- If it's crucify Him, it could be that you don't really believe in him as Savior and Lord. Maybe you are apathetic about Him and threatened about what He might ask you to be or do. Possibly, there are just too many other things you want out of life and if the truth be known He just isn't at the top of your priority scale. Maybe you are saying "crucify Him" through your words and actions which are hurting others whom He loves.

Be sure of this my friends, even though others around you may not know your response, you can be very certain that He knows. If you would like to talk and pray with someone about who this Jesus is to you, there will be members of our prayer team in the alcove to my right over by the cross.

As the now Risen and Reigning Christ stands before us on this Palm Sunday, I challenge you to crown Him as the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings!