

“In The Crowd”  
John 12:12-19  
April 10, 2022

This weekend Tiger Woods is playing in the Masters’ Golf Tournament, his first competitive tournament after being in a serious car accident about 18 months. Last week, before the tournament started, it was reported that over 35,000 people were flocking to the golf course on just one day, jockeying for position, hoping to simply get a glimpse of Tiger practicing on the course. Golf fans are filled with excitement that one of the most dominant players to ever hit a golf ball is playing in this tournament once again, as large crowds are watching the tournament live in person and on TV, but what are they hoping to see? Do they think that Tiger will win the tournament again? Are they hoping to see him hit some good shots? Will they be satisfied just to see him finish the tournament? What are they hoping to see?

Palm Sunday reminds us that Jesus was entering Jerusalem with the same kind of excited, growing crowds. His reputation as a teacher, and more recently as the one who had miraculously raised Lazarus from the dead – that we looked at on Wednesday night – had preceded Him. This crowd in our text greets Jesus with great joy as people wave palm branches and shout, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!” The word “Hosanna” means “save us,” but from what did the crowd want Jesus to save them? What exactly did they want Jesus to do?

By calling him, “The King of Israel,” did the people want Jesus to save them from the oppression of the Roman government that was ruling their land, treating them like second-class citizens, and taxing them into submission? While those words, “King of Israel,” were certainly theologically correct, I’m sure the mindset of the crowd was that Jesus was going to be an earthly

type of king, who would restore Israel to power like it was during the days of King David almost 1000 years earlier.

Or when the people shouted, “Hosanna,” did they want Jesus to save them from the problems of their lives, such as a difficult marriage, a disease, demon possession, sick children, the pain from the death of a loved one, unemployment, or loneliness and make life more enjoyable?

I wonder if Jesus decided to make a visible appearance today in our world, how many people do you think would line the streets and cry out to him, “Hosanna! Save us!” Would there be crowds like a Tiger Woods’ golf tournament? I’m sure some of us may think, “There probably wouldn’t be many people who would come out.” But I don’t know; it might be just the opposite. After all, I think there are many people in the world and in our community who have called out to God to save them. It’s kind of a natural response when tragedy strikes, when sorrow or sadness comes, when life is hard, when we’re facing financial difficulties, when we’re hearing about new variants of Covid-19, when the future seems uncertain; when we’re facing our limitations, our weaknesses, and our mortality, people then are quick to cry out, “Lord, save us!” But again, from what are we looking to be saved? Saved from the things we don’t like, things that make us uncomfortable, things that are scary? Save us from those things so that we can do what we want to do? What are we looking for Jesus to do for us?

Jesus certainly cares about the things that you and I are going through today. In fact, God invites us to call upon Him when we are hurting saying, “Call on me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you, and you will honor me” (Psalm 50:15). Jesus definitely sees and cares about your struggles, fears, problems, and sorrows that you face. He loves you and wants to help you. Just look at Jesus’ life and ministry that was lived and conducted out in the open with people. Jesus was interested in people, He was involved in their lives and in their problems. His

miracles relieved people's suffering and removed limitations which allowed them to enjoy life more fully. I'm sure He saves us from our problems and struggles or He gives us the strength to endure them more than we probably realize. But if that's all we are looking for Jesus to do, then like many in that Palm Sunday crowd, we have also missed who this man riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday truly is for us.

If Jesus is only someone to save us from the struggles of this life and make us comfortable for now, knowing that when the end comes, we will be lost forever, separated from Him for eternity in hell, then Jesus isn't much of a Savior at all. That fact is Jesus does not want you to be comfortable or happy just for a while, He wants you to know joy and real peace forever. So what would it take to make that happen? It would take Palm Sunday. It would take God, the creator of the world and all people to come into this world as one of us and to take our place. So Jesus comes into Jerusalem for you and me, knowing what is waiting for Him and what would happen to Him over the next week – hatred, betrayal, desertion, suffering, crucifixion, and death. Jesus goes to Jerusalem to offer His perfect life in the place of imperfect people, like us, who have at times have tried to manipulate Jesus into the type of Savior we want Him to be, instead of the Savior we need Him to be for us. Jesus goes to Jerusalem to die so that when our life comes to an end here in this sinful world, it will not be the end, but the beginning of perfection, joy, happiness, and peace that will have no end. That's what the empty tomb of Easter assures us is waiting for us at the end of this life – a perfect life that has no end.

Many times in our world, crowds get it wrong. In fact, throughout the Bible there are many times when a crowd spoke or when a majority vote was taken and they got it wrong. For example, there was Adam & Eve in the garden (at that time, of course, they were the majority) and they voted or chose to disobey God; Noah took on the entire world as they mocked and

ridiculed him for building an ark when it wasn't raining; a crowd tried to build a tower to Babel for themselves, but God stopped that project by confusing their languages so it couldn't be built; a crowd convinced Moses' brother, Aaron, that Moses wasn't coming down from Mt. Sinai and to build a golden calf as their god. In the New Testament, soon after the disciples all promised to stay with Jesus, even through death, they all fled when Jesus was arrested and put on trial; and possibly the worst decision ever made by a crowd was when Pontius Pilate offered to release one man during the Passover festival: Jesus (who had done nothing wrong) or Barabbas (who was a convicted murder), and the crowd shouted, "Give us Barabbas!"

In our Gospel lesson for today we see a crowd that once again got it wrong. Confronted with Jesus, who would not just lead them, but transform them, all the crowd could think to do was to celebrate Jesus' arrival as a national, warrior-king who would free them from the Roman government. But when the truth of His Kingship became clear – that following Jesus would not lead to freedom from Rome or freedom from the struggles of life, but to a cross and freedom from sin, the crowd evaporated. In less than a week, the crowd that cheered Him became the crowd that condemned Him. The people thought their biggest oppressor was the government, but they were wrong.

Sometimes it seems like many people in our own country have the same mind set. Consider, are people more worried about government regulations over Covid than they are about the effects of sin and death? Are people more concerned about germs than they are about temptations? Do we crave good weather from God so our children can play in their sporting events on a Sunday morning more than we crave God's Word and His Sacrament of Holy Communion? Hosanna! Save us, Lord, from our earthly priorities!

What crowd are you in today? Are you following the will of God or are you trying to fit in with the popular crowd? Are you prepared to give God your best, in all areas of your life, even if it's not popular; or are you in the crowd of our society that says, "You deserve the very best. You are #1. Watch out only for yourself." Real love moves people to action, and if we truly love God as His children, then we must be prepared to give our best, to speak the truth in love, and to stand alone, if necessary, in all circumstances, to insure that people know who Jesus is, why He came, and that His love is made known for all to see.