

Palm Sunday

THE SHOW “QUEEN FOR A DAY” FIRST AIRED AS A RADIO SHOW FROM 1945-1957, AND THEN TRANSITIONED TO TV, FROM 1956-1964. THE PLOT OF THE SHOW ALWAYS CENTERED AROUND FINDING A WOMAN LIVING IN DIFFICULT CONDITIONS MAKING HER QUEEN FOR A DAY. AFTER SHE WAS SELECTED FOR THIS HONOR, SHE WOULD BE PICKED UP BY A CHAUFFER-DRIVEN LIMOUSINE AND TAKEN TO A BEVERLY HILLS SALON AND GIVEN A COMPLETE MAKEOVER, THEN SHE WOULD BE FITTED FOR A NEW WARDROBE AND TAKEN TO A CELEBRATED RESTAURANT ESCORTED BY SOME HOLLYWOOD CELEBRITIES. FOR THE NIGHT SHE WOULD STAY IN A LUXURY HOTEL, BUT THE NEXT DAY SHE WOULD BE TAKEN BACK TO HER SMALL APARTMENT AND RETURNED TO HER FORMER LIFE. SHE HAD BEEN QUEEN FOR A DAY.

THE STORY THAT CONFRONTS US IN LUKE’S GOSPEL THAT WE CALL THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY UPON CLOSE EXAMINATION COULD BE RENAMED KING FOR A DAY AND DEMONSTRATES THE FICKLE NATURE OF THOSE WHO WOULD FOLLOW JESUS.

A PASTOR REMEMBERS A PALM SUNDAY WHEN A TEENAGED BOY SERVING AS THE ACOLYTE FOR THE MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE, STANDING WITH THE CROSS AT THE HEAD OF THE PALM SUNDAY PROCESSION AND TURNED TO THE HIM SAID, “I DON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT I AM SUPPOSED TO BE FEELING.” HE WELL CAPTURED THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE DAY. PALM SUNDAY IS A DAY OF MIXED EMOTIONS.

THERE WERE TWO AND A HALF MILLION PEOPLE IN JERUSALEM THAT DAY. THEY HAD RETURNED FROM ALL OVER THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN FOR THE PASSOVER FEAST. THIS WAS THE WORLD SERIES, THE SUPER BOWL, AND THE MASTERS ROLLED INTO ONE. THEY KNEW JESUS WAS AT BETHANY AND WHAT HE COULD DO. IT WAS EXPECTED THAT HE WOULD PROCLAIM HIMSELF MESSIAH SOMETIME THAT WEEK. EARILER HE HAD GRABBED THEIR ATTENTION BY RAISING LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD. WITH JESUS IN TOWN, THIS WAS GOING TO BE A PASSOEVER TO REMEMBER.

HIS DISCIPLES HAD BORROWED A DONKEY FOR HIS RIDE INTO THE CITY. THAT ALONE TOLD PEOPLE THAT HE WAS A MAN OF PEACE AND THAT HE WAS NOT IN THE MOLD OF THE ROMAN GENERALS WHO ALWAYS RODE INTO TOWN ON A WARHORSE. AS HE RIDES INTO THE CITY OF JERUSALEM ON A BORROWED DONKEY, PEOPLE CROWD THE STREETS TO HAIL HIM MESSIAH: “THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!” THEY PLACED PALM BRANCHES IN THIS PATH, AND THEY GAVE EVERY INDICATION THAT THEY KNOW HE FULFILLS THE PICTURE OF THE MESSIAH FOUND IN ZECHARIAH 9:9. BUT THEY MELT AWAY AS THEY SEE THAT DURING THE WEEK HE IS NOT GONG TO FIT INTO THEIR POPULAR IMAGE OF THE MESSIAH; AND BY HIS TEACHING AND ACTION, HE CALLS THEM TO MAKE DIFFICULT DECISIONS ABOUT HIMSELF AND ABOUT THEIR OWN LIVES.

TODAY'S EVENT BEGINS HOLY WEEK. THIS WEEK IS EVENTFUL AND REVEALING. IN IT WE CAN SEE HOW THE TIDE OF POPULAR OPINION TURNS AGAINST JESUS AS THE WEEK PROGRESSES. THE SAME CROWDS THAT CRIED "HOSANNA" ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK CRIED "CRUCIFY HIM!" AT THE END OF THE WEEK. WHY? COULD IT HAVE BEEN BECAUSE THEY WANTED AN INSTANT KINGDOM, AND HE OFFERED THEM AN ETERNAL KINGDOM? OR COULD IT HAVE BEEN BECAUSE THE CROWDS WANTED ENTERTAINMENT, NOT ENRICHMENT? PERHAPS ONCE THE PALM SUNDAY PARADE WAS OVER, THEIR ATTENTION WAS ONTO THE NEXT THING? NO, THAT WOULD BE MORE OUR PROBLEM. DID YOU KNOW THE AVERAGE AMERICAN ATTENTION SPAN IS APPROXIMATELY 8.25 SECONDS? RECENT STUDIES SUGGESTING A DECREASE OF NEARLY 25% BETWEEN 2000 AND 2015. A DECLINE ATTRIBUTED TO TECHNOLOGY AND A CULTURE OF CONSTANT STIMULATION. PARADE'S OVER, ONTO THE NEXT THING. PERHAPS IT WAS SIMPLY THAT DURING THE WEEK WHEN THE PEOPLE SAW THE DEMANDS OF JESUS' KINGDOM AND THEY WERE NOT WILLING TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES, MUCH LESS THEIR LIFESTYLES, THEY LOST INTEREST. ONTO THE NEXT THING...

IT IS VERY SIMPLE. JESUS RESISTED ANY ATTEMPT TO MAKE HIS MESSAGE OR MINISTRY A SERVANT TO THE CULTURE, TO THE GOVERNMENT OR ANY OTHER GROUP. AS THIS BECAME CLEAR, THE CROWDS BEGAN TO MELT AWAY. THEY WEREN'T MUCH DIFFERENT THAN WE ARE. ANY FAITH THAT CLAIMS FIRST PLACE IN OUR LIVES IS NOT ACCEPTABLE; AFTER ALL, OUR FAITH SHOULD SUPPORT US, OUR WORLD VIEW, AND DEMAND NOTHING OF US.

WE ARE A CULTURE OF INSTANT EVERYTHING; A CULTURE OF CONSTANT STIMULATION....OF SCROLLING ON OUR DEVICES.

A GOD WHO DOES NOT GIVE US WHAT WE WANT NOW IS OF NO USE TO US. THE IDEA OF A WORSHIP SERVICE THAT IS NOT IMMEDIATELY TRANSLATABLE INTO USEFUL WAYS TO DO OR NOT DO SOMETHING ON MONDAY MORNING IS A WASTE OF TIME. WE PRAY AND EXPECT GOD TO JUMP. FOR MANY, RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT IS AN ADD-ON TO THEIR LIVES, SUCH AS ANY OTHER ACCESSORY. THE IDEA OF A GOD WHO DOES NOT GIVE US SHORT, IMMEDIATE THRILLS WILL NOT HAVE US FOR VERY LONG. TRUTH PRESENTED BY SCRIPTURE BUT NOT SUPPORTED BY AN OPINION POLL HAS NO CLAIM ON US.

JESUS WOULD NOT ADJUST HIS MESSAGE TO THE POPULAR IDEAS OF THE MESSIAH THAT PREVAILED IN HIS DAY. HE CALLED HIS DISCIPLES TO A LIFE-TIME COMMITMENT AND NOT TO A SHORT-TERM FAD. HE WOULD NOT ADJUST HIS MESSAGE TO THEIR WHIMS OR GAIN FOLLOWING BY KEEPING THEM ENTERTAINED.

HOWEVER, WE LIKE THE CROWD ON THAT JERUSALEM STREET, ARE NO DIFFERENT.

GOD CALLS US TO REPENTANCE. WE WANT TO MAKE A DEAL.

GOD SAYS HIS KINGDOM IS FOREVER, AND WE SAY IT IS AS LONG AS I NEED IT OR CAN USE IT.

GOD SAYS ALL THINGS ARE HIS. WE MAKES EXCUSES AS TO WHY WE CAN'T GIVE BACK TO GOD.

GOD STRETCHES US. HE DOES NOT STROKE OUR EGOS.

GOD IS CONCERNED WITH OUR COMMITMENT AND NOT OUR PLEASURE. JESUS IS NOT INTERESTED IN BEING KING FOR A DAY, BUT HE DOES WANT TO BE LORD OF OUR LIVES.

A COUPLE TRAVELED TO HONG KONG FOR A VACATION AND WHILE SITE SEEING, THEIR GUIDE WORE A BEAUTIFUL CROSS NECKLACE. UPON SEEING IT, THE WOMAN COMMENTED TO THE GUIDE, "WHAT A LOVELY NECKLACE, ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?" "NO," THE GUIDE REPLIED, "IT'S JUST FOR LOOKS."

THE SAD PART OF THIS IS THAT THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT CAN ONLY BE KNOWN BY COMMITMENT. WE DON'T KNOW THE JOY OF LOVING AND BEING LOVED UNLESS WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE ONE WE LOVE. WE DON'T KNOW THE SATISFACTION OF SERIOUS ACCOMPLISHMENT IF WE HAVE NEVER COMMITTED OURSELVES TO A CHALLENGE. CHRISTIAN FAITH CAN ONLY BE UNDERSTOOD WHEN IT IS A LIFE-TIME COMMITMENT.

HOLY WEEK INVITES US TO LOOK DEEPER AT OUR COMMITMENT. IT INVITES US TO DECIDE. SCRIPTURE IS SURE IN ITS ASSERTION THAT COMMITMENT IS THE WAY OF FAITH. FOR MANY, THEIR COMMITMENT TO THEIR FAVORITE FOOTBALL TEAM OR POLITICAL PARTY OR SECULAR CLUB RECEIVES WAY MORE THAN A COMMITMENT TO THEIR FAITH THEY PROCLAIM TO PROFESS.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INVITES EACH OF US TO RE-EXAMINE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE MISSION OF JESUS AND OUR COMMITMENT TO HIM. AS WE SEE THE CROWDS MELT AWAY AS THE WEEK BECOMES MORE DIFFICULT AND THE CHALLENGES TO COMMITMENT BECOME MORE INTENSE, WE MUST ASK OURSELVES, "HAVE WE MADE JESUS KING FOR A DAY OR LORD OF OUR LIVES?"