

Reflection – Palm Sunday 2020
Catherine Campbell
Matthew 21:1-11
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Passion According to Matthew

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in your sight, oh Christ, my strength and my redeemer.

Good morning, dear ones. I hope you are all well and safe.

When I started working with today's reading, what struck me most, not surprising in a time of social distancing and quarantine, was how much of Christ's final week involves crowds. Very different crowds, to be sure, but they play a pivotal role in the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion.

The first crowd, let's call it the "good crowd," is one anyone would like to join. The people of Jerusalem gather and acclaim Jesus as he enters the city, crying "hosanna." Their salvation is at hand, and they are filled with joy and love for this man riding into the city. I like to imagine their excited chatter to one another about what they're seeing, their eagerness for a new Jerusalem, wondering what the city will look

like now that Jesus, God's prophet, has come to save them. This is a crowd most of us would very much like to be a part of, where the joy and energy experienced by those around us becomes something that, quite literally, feeds our own joy.

Then, there's the other crowd, the one that appears a few short days later. Shall we call them the "bad crowd," or is that too judgmental? This crowd is also full of energy, and is also focused on Jesus, but in a completely different way. "Crucify him!" they yell. Even when Pilate asks them again, the response is the same: "Crucify him!" This crowd is feeding off the energy of those around them, but this is an energy of anger and violence, springing from a deep sense of fear for what this man Jesus might bring to Jerusalem, what he will provoke the Romans to do to their city, their families and to them.

What's remarkable about the two crowds is that they are the same people. How quickly these people turned on a dime, and how swiftly Jesus went from being their hero and salvation to a dangerous criminal who must be killed.

We see similar themes of desertion and betrayal among those closest to Jesus, as well. The disciples can't manage to stay awake to pray with him. Peter, because of what we call peer pressure today, denies Jesus three times. And of course, the biggest betrayal of all, Judas handing over Jesus to the authorities, with a kiss, no less.

People, it seems, are changeable and fickle, and a hero can become a villain in the blink of an eye. At this point, I could talk about how, in many ways, examining these failures in the Gospel is a call to us to look into a mirror, to examine ourselves, our thoughts and feelings, and to think about how we see ourselves in today's drama. And that is an important thing to do.

But it's not the MOST important thing we are called to do. The most important thing for us to do comes to us in today's reading from Philippians, in the opening line, "Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus." "Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus."

What was Christ's attitude toward the welcoming crowd crying "Hosanna"? He looked at them and loved them.

What was Christ's attitude toward Peter, when he knew Peter, despite Peter's words of devotion, would deny ever having known him? He looked at him and loved him.

What was Christ's attitude toward the disciples who couldn't manage to stay awake to comfort him with their presence? He looked at them and loved them.

The crowds gathered in front of the palace, government buildings and the courtyard, demanding Jesus' blood? Jesus looked at them, and loved them...he loved them as fully as he did when they were singing Hosannas at his entry.

What was Christ's attitude toward Judas, is turning him over to death? He looked at him, called him friend, and loved him.

The High Priest and elders who railroaded his trial and conviction? He looked at them and loved them.

The Roman soldiers who flogged him and nailed him to the cross? He looked at them and loved them.

That is the attitude of Jesus – he looks at us, and he loves us.

When we do things that require incredible bravery and sacrifice to act for the good of others, Jesus looks at us and loves us.

When we watch the news and find ourselves filled with anger, an anger rooted in fear of what is going to happen us, Jesus looks at us and loves us.

Just like those crowds in Jerusalem, Jesus loves us at our best, and he loves us at our worst. Like our beautiful banner in the Parish Hall that we all hope to gather in again soon says, “Jesus loves you. No matter what.”

There is comfort in this, but we can’t allow ourselves to forget the challenge there as well. “Imitate the attitude of Christ Jesus.”

When you see people being their best selves, and displaying generosity and sacrifice, look at them and love them.

When you see people succumbing to their worst fears, and playing those fears out in selfishness, unkindness, even hatred and violence, look at them, and love them.

Much like Holy Week in Jerusalem, events in our own lives right now are moving rapidly and are confusing and scary. Many of us are on an emotional roller coaster between “I’ve got this - I can make it through this” and “I’m frightened out of my mind.”

Now, today, as it was two thousand plus years ago in Jerusalem, the constant, the one constant in a terrifying world, is Jesus, who looks at us, sees us, and loves us, and invites us to do the same to those around us.

Imitate the attitude of Christ Jesus, and love.

Amen.