

Sermon for Sunday April 12, 1981, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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NOT EVERYBODY LOVES A PARADE

St. Mark 11:1-10

Text: "And those who went before and those who followed cried out, 'Hosanna! blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Yesterday Jack Carney had a parade and he called it "I've never been asked to be in a parade before parade". Somebody called him up and told him my sermon title which is "Not Everybody Loves a Parade". There really is no connection but I understand that on the radio he said if it rained on his parade he was going to pray that it rained on my sermon this morning. I tell you if he starts messing with my boss that employees me he might get thunder and lightning next time.

In the Old Testament there are two distinctly different pictures of the Messiah. One is pictured as the suffering Servant. When the prophets spoke of this Messiah of God he was seen as a humble man who suffered for others and who would be rejected by his own countrymen. Isaiah wrote of him this way: "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

The second Messiah pictured in the Old Testament is quite different. He is pictured as a triumphant King. He is pictured as a political deliverer who would free Israel from her oppressors. He is seen as a conquering hero who would bring peace and rule the whole world from Jerusalem. Through him the Jews would become the spiritual and secular leaders of the world.

Which of these two Messiahs would you want to come? Put yourself in the place of the Jews that day. For centuries your nation has been controlled by others. Your city is patrolled by Roman soldiers and your land is governed by a Roman ruler. You are taxed and oppressed. You are treated as a second-class human being with little or no rights. And would you not have longed to be set free, to get even with your enemies? Yes, it was the second Messiah that the Jews wanted--a Triumphant King.

So, on Palm Sunday they lined the streets as Jesus passed by and they got carried away. Maybe this was the Messiah after all! They began waving palm branches and shouting and cheering and some got so excited they put their coats down in the streets for Jesus to ride over. "Hosanna!", they shouted, "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Five days later they were back. This time the multitude had become a mob. Cheers changed to jeers, hosannas changed to hissings, palms changed to thorns. The chant of the crowd was different this time. This time they did not say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." This time they cried out, "Crucify him, Crucify him!"

What happened in those five short days between Palm Sunday and Good Friday to change them so? Let me suggest to you that Jesus did some things that made them see themselves as they really were. Now, that is dangerous business. People don't like to have their self-image revealed when it exposes them as frauds. That's one reason Christianity will never be successful as the world counts success. To be a Christian you have to admit certain things about yourself. You have to admit you are a sinner and people don't like to admit that. You have to admit you can't do very much about it and people don't like to admit they are helpless. You have to trust someone else entirely to do something for you and we don't like to confess we need someone else. Jesus forced men to take a hard look at themselves. And when they looked, they didn't like what they saw. In anger and resentment they took him out to Calvary and killed him. See how it works!

Let me give you four words--you can write them on the margin of your bulletin. The words misused--abused--confused--refused. First he exposed the fact that they misused the church. During that week Jesus went into the temple. He turned over the tables of the money changers, he drove out the animals and in a voice that spoke with the judgment of God he said, "My father's house shall be called a house of prayer." Yes, they had misused the church. I wonder what Jesus would do about the church today? Would he think the church was being prostituted by making it into a social action organization? What would Jesus say about the misuse by certain liberal elements who use the church for gratification of their desire for power, their desire to control and manipulate? What would Jesus say about the use of the church when it is misused as a political platform for the pet projects and political goals of some? What would Jesus say about church leaders who take church funds and buy stock in a corporation so they can go to the stockholders meetings and abuse the people who run the company and try to twist the company to do the things they want to do. What would Jesus say about such things as the World Council of Churches which uses its power and financial influence to foster Communistic rebellion and insurrection. And the conservatives are not guiltless in the misuse of the church. They are often guilty of using the church to block change, to avoid staying relevant to the times, for failing to be involved in the needs of the world. If the King came today he would be angry; he would overturn the tables of our misuse of his church and with a voice of judgment cry out to us, "My father's house shall be called a house of prayer."

But the Jews crucified Jesus five days after Palm Sunday because in the second place he exposed their abuse of the law. The religious leaders had built up a tradition of interpreting the law which made keeping God's word an external thing. One day Jesus told a parable about two people who went into the temple to pray and one was a pharisee. He kept all those outward manifestations of being holy. Standing next to him was a publican who couldn't even raise his eyes up at God, but hide his face and smote his breast and cried out, "Oh, God, something inside of me is all wrong--be merciful to me". And the pharisee standing next to him who had done all the external things said, "God, look at me. I just thank you that I am not like other people--I've done all these things". But inside he was rotten. And Jesus pointed out what the law really meant. He told them that murder was not just refraining from actually killing someone, but that it was being angry with your neighbor without just cause. He told them that adultery was more than the physical act, for in God's sight adultery included merely looking at a woman with lust in one's heart. And when the Jews realized that God looks upon the heart and not just upon the outward performance of man it made them angry. It meant they were not nearly so holy as they thought and each stood judged before God.

What would Jesus say this morning about the abuse of the law by God's people? What would he say about the so-called new morality? What would he say about the permissiveness preached from many a pulpit today? What would he say about a nation of people who consider sin illegal only if they get caught? What would Jesus say about those who endorsed homosexuality, or that approve of abortion, and say the the law of God is outdated, old fashioned, and out of step with the times? What would Jesus say about the immorality so characteristic of our day? Yes, the Jews abused the law of God and Jesus stripped them of their pretensions so that their souls were exposed even to themselves. And when they realized that, they put him to the cross. One wonders what would happen if Jesus returned today--are there not those who would still crucify him? Just recently in Washington the Presbytery there received a man of the Presbyterian ministry who denied the deity of Christ--who denied the vicarious substitutionary atonement on the cross--who does not believe in his resurrection. He has crucified afresh our Saviour. Why? Because if you believe in Jesus in the way the Bible, says it strips you of all your righteousness and exposes you for who and what you are.

Yes, they misused the church and they abused the law. Notice in the third place that they confused the problem. They thought their problems were outer problems. They thought their problem was the fact that they were overrun by Roman and subject to Roman rule. They thought their problems would all be solved if only Rome could be defeated and driven from their boundaries. And that is why they wanted a Messiah King and not a Suffering Servant. They wanted someone to solve their outer problems.

But Jesus came to show them that their problems were not outer--their problems were not worldly or material. No, their problem was a problem of the heart, an inner spiritual problem. And how would Jesus feel about our problems today? We've got lots of them! War, crime, pollution, ghettos, racism, poverty and a host of others. So many today think that all would be well if we could solve our outer problems. The new humanism that dominates the church today assumes that if we can cure the ills of society we can cure the problems of the world. But Jesus said that our real problem is an inner problem, a problem of the heart, a spiritual problem. Someone has said you can scrub a pig clean, anoint him with perfume, tie a ribbon around his neck and put him in the living room. But still that pig will jump in the first mud puddle he sees. Clearing him up, sweetening his odor, dressing him up doesn't change the fact that he is a pig. The same is true with mankind. Until man's heart is changed, until he is born again by the inner working of the Holy Spirit, until he is a new creature in Jesus he will still jump in the first moral mud puddle he sees.

Yes, if Jesus came today, he would discover that we, too, have confused our problem, for our problem is still an inner problem. And if we solved the present problems of the world, because man is still, spiritually speaking, a pig, we would jump back into the first moral mud hole we found. The tragedy of the so-called liberal movement in the church today is that it has focused in on the wrong problem. Our problem is not so much an outer, material or social problem. Our real problem is an inner spiritual problem, a problem of the heart. Yes, a man must be born again before he can enter the kingdom of God.

So, they misused the church, they abused the law, they confused the problem. And when Jesus exposed them for who and what they are, they did one final thing. They refused the king. When he made them see themselves as they were, they became angry because we don't like to be exposed, to be made to see ourselves in all of our sin. So they refused the king. They took him out to Calvary and there they crucified him. They said, we don't want a king like you. They said, "there is another king spoken of in the Old Testament. He is the king we want. He is a king who will free us politically. He is the king who will make us great, who will liberate us and make us the rulers of the world. We will want for that king", they said.

So, the king who came on Palm Sunday was a king who came to die. He came to die for the very people who crucified him. They never realized he came to die for the very things that made them crucify him--their misuse of the church their abuse of the law, their confusion of the problem, their refusal of the king. As the Scripture said, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." So on Good Friday he died--that's why he came.

But what about the other king? Did he ever come? Will he come? The Jews never realized that there wouldn't be two kings. They never realized that the same king was coming twice. First he came as the king to die. But that same king is coming again. He is coming as the triumphant King, the conquering King, the victorious King, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And when he comes again only those who have loved the suffering king, the king who came to die, will be there to welcome him. Someday it will be another Palm Sunday again when the redeemed will welcome the king who will come again. And who will be among those who greet him with cries of, "Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord?" Will you?