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Sermon: April 5, 2009
Beverly ECC

“KING FOR A DAY”
Matthew 21:9; 27:22-23

☐ {Mt 21:9} **“The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Hosanna in the highest heaven!’”** It was a procession fit for a king!

☐ Yet those shouts of praise are shadowed by the ugly screams recorded a few chapters later {Mt 27:22-23}:

“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked.

They all answered, “Crucify him!”

“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

From **“Blessed is he!”** on Palm Sunday to **“Crucify him!”** on Good Friday! What happened?

☞ The short answer is that many in that Sunday crowd expected Jesus to seize power, slaughter the Romans, and reestablish David’s kingdom, replete with invincible armies, unlimited wealth and global prestige. When they realized He was not going to fulfill their expectations, they turned on him as a failure who had disappointed them or, worse, a fraud who had deceived them.

✠ Of course, Jesus never claimed to be *that* kind of king. His kingdom is a place of {Lk 4:18} **“freedom for... prisoners,” “recovery of sight for the blind,”** and liberty for the oppressed. His kingdom is populated, not by those who are rich in worldly wealth and power, but by {Mt 5:3-10} **“the poor in spirit...those who mourn... the meek... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...the**

merciful ...the pure in heart... the peacemakers” and **“those who are persecuted because of”** him. He was very clear about this.

☞ Nevertheless, they failed to grasp the Good News. So they made Jesus king for a day on Sunday, then demanded his crucifixion on Friday.

Thank God we could never be so blind and stupid!

☑ Fast forward to 1880 AD, the year Fyodor Dostoevsky published The Brothers Karamazov. In chapter 5 he has his character Ivan tell a story:

Jesus appears in Seville, Spain in the 1500’s, during the time of the Inquisition. He walks among the crowds, healing the sick and raising the dead.

The people instantly recognize him. Children shout “Hosanna!” and throw flowers before him.

The Grand Inquisitor recognizes Christ, too, and orders his arrest. Face-to-face with the Lord, this worldly-wise churchman denounces Jesus for resisting Satan’s temptations in the desert.

⊙ You offer the bread of heaven, the Grand Inquisitor lectures, but the people want the bread of earth. They will gladly follow anyone who fills their bellies. You should have turned the stones to bread.

⊙ You offer humility, he scolds, but the people want signs and wonders. They will gladly believe anyone who dazzles them. You should have jumped from the temple.

⊙ You offer freedom, he accuses, but the people want someone to rule with a firm hand. They will gladly receive salvation from anyone who compels it. You should have taken possession of the kingdoms.

The Grand Inquisitor orders Christ to leave. His presence will disrupt the Church's efforts to satisfy the crowds, who will surely turn on him as they did before.

☛ It is only a parable, and not even one from Scripture at that. Yet it becomes real in our lives every time we remake Jesus in the image of earthly kings, every time we trade in God's Kingdom for political power and tangible wealth, and every time we substitute religion for discipleship.

Perhaps the jarring disconnect between Palm Sunday and Good Friday is not so hard to understand.

Maybe we are not so different from those people, after all.

Thank God, Palm Sunday and Good Friday are not about the crowds; they are about Jesus.

Jesus did not tailor his message and actions to human demands. As He says, {Jn 8:28-29} **"I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me... I always do what pleases him."**

✝ Since it pleased the Father for the Son to suffer, die and rise again to accomplish our forgiveness and establish his kingdom on earth, that is what He did.

No question about it, this {1 Co 1:18} **"is foolishness to"** the Good Friday mob and the Grand Inquisitor and others **"who are perishing, but to [those] who are being saved it is the power of God."**

The question is will we crown Jesus our king for a day, like the Palm Sunday crowd?

Or will we crown Jesus our king for life?