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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“KING FOR A DAY”
Luke 19:28-48

On Sunday many people receive Jesus with shouts of praise: {Mt 21:9} **“Hosanna to the Son of David!”** {Lk 19:38} **“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! ‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’”**

On Friday many people reject Jesus with shrieks of contempt: {Jn 19:15} **“Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar.”** {Lk 23:18, 21} **“Away with this man! Crucify him! Crucify him!”**

The prevailing mood shifts from praise to denunciation in under a week. The adoring crowd degenerates into an ugly mob in five short days.

‡ *Why the difference? What provokes the change?*

To be sure, not everyone who witnesses the Triumphal Entry shouts, “Hosanna!” And the tried-and-true followers of Jesus do not call for his crucifixion.

Still, there is overlap between the crowd and the mob. The change is striking and abrupt.

Hear the crowd shouting on Sunday: **“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”** (Luke 19:38). **“Hosanna to the Son of David!”** (Matthew 21:9). **“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”** (Mk 11:10). **“Blessed is the king of Israel!”** (Jn 12:13).

This Sunday crowd acclaims Jesus of Nazareth king of Israel, and they are right. *But what do they mean by it?*

There is compelling evidence that most of the crowd imagines that Jesus is the Warrior King *par excellence*. In

their eyes he is a new and improved David who will fulfill their fondest dreams by crushing Rome, cleansing Israel of sinners and foreigners, and reestablishing their ancient kingdom on a grander scale, replete with invincible armies, unlimited wealth, and global prestige. And if the people need bread or healing or a storm to end, he can always perform another miracle.

But Jesus has never claimed to be *that kind of king*.

This crowd expects Jesus to purify Israel of sinners; yet Christ’s kingdom is populated by {1 Co 1:26-29} **“the foolish... weak ... [and] lowly,”** riff-raff who are saved not by their goodness but in spite of their badness. {Lk 5:30-32} Jesus frequently eats and drinks with tax collectors and “sinners” for **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.** [He has] **not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”**

This crowd expects Jesus to enrich Israel with gold and silver and jewels; yet Christ’s kingdom is not a place to accumulate material wealth. He commands everyone: {Mt 5:19-21} **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... store [them] up...in heaven...”** When a rich young ruler declines to {Lk 18:22-24} **“Sell everything... give to the poor, and... follow”** Jesus laments, **“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”**

The crowd expects Jesus to give them worldly power; yet Christ’s kingdom does not accommodate those who would be “King of the Hill.” When James

and John petition for the highest honor and authority the Lord answers, {Mt 20:26-28} **“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Many did not come to be served, but to serve.”**

The crowd expects Jesus to crush pagan armies; yet Christ’s kingdom is not built or defended by Holy War. It functions by his command to {Lk 6:27-28} **“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”** As Jesus will tell Pilate, {Jn 18:36} **“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest... my kingdom is from another place.”**

He has repeatedly said: {Lk 9:23} **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”** He has plainly taught: {Lk 9:24} **“whoever wants to save their life will lose it, whoever loses their life for me will save it.”** He has clearly announced: {Lk 6:20-22, 24-26} **“Blessed are you... poor ...you...[hungry] ...you... who weep now....”; “woe to you rich...you...well fed... you who laugh now.”**

Nevertheless, the Palm Sunday crowd fails to grasp the Good News of the Kingdom. **“Blessed is *the king*...!”** they shout. **“Hosanna to the *Son of David!*”** **“Blessed is the coming *kingdom of our father David!*”** **“Blessed is the *king of Israel!*”** Their words are spot-on; but what they *mean* by them could hardly be further off the mark.

But Christ Jesus finally deflates their false expectations by what he does, and does not do, immediately following his Triumphal Entry.

As Luke 19:45-46 describes it, Jesus enters the temple area with the crowd in tow, begins **“driving out those who [are] selling,”** and thunders: **“It is written, ‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”**

This is the moment! The Messiah has gathered his forces and taken back the Holy Temple for God. Surely he will capitalize on his momentum, kill the pagan Roman usurpers and slaughter their ungodly Herodian lapdogs!

Instead, he just.... leaves the city, squandering this opportunity which to them has so obviously been given by the LORD Almighty! Israel’s glorious future of health and wealth and security and power crumbles before their eyes.

The crowd’s excitement and enthusiasm fizzle. It is obvious now that Jesus of Nazareth will *not* meet their highest expectations, will *not* fulfill their fondest dreams, will *not* make their deepest hopes come true.

By Friday, it is a simple matter for Jesus’ enemies to stir them up to scream **“Crucify him!”** and to demand Barabbas’ release. Barabbas has taken part in a rebellion against Rome. Barabbas has killed for freedom. Barabbas will do for them what Jesus won’t.

On Sunday the crowd makes Jesus king for a day. On Friday they demand his death.

Thank God we could never be so blind and stupid!

☑ Fast forward to 1880 AD, the year Dostoevsky published his novel The Brothers Karamazov. In chapter 5 one of his characters tells 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 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 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 people want someone to rule them 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. Yet it becomes real among us when we try to remake Jesus to fit our false images. It is acted out among us when we try to redefine the kingdom of God to make it look and operate more like a worldly kingdom. It takes on substance among us when we prefer

material riches to spiritual wealth, power to service, violence to peace, pride to humility, comfort to obedience.

Perhaps the stark 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, who did not tailor his message and his actions to human demands then, or now. He himself says, {Jn 8:28-29} "**I...speak just what the Father has taught me... I always do what pleases him.**"

† It pleased the Father for his Son to die and rise again to accomplish our forgiveness and establish his kingdom on earth, and that is what he did. This {1 Co 1:18} "**is foolishness to**" the Good Friday mob, the Grand Inquisitor, and those "**who are perishing, but to [those] who are being saved it is the power of God.**"

? The question is: *will we* shout "**Hosanna!**" and *crown Jesus king for a day*, only to reject him when he does not live up to our false expectations?

? *Or will we crown Jesus king for life* and cling to him whatever he allows, and follow him wherever he leads?