

March 29, 2015
Holy Week 2015
Why the Cheering Stopped
Mark 11:1-11

Opening words: There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not a single one should be wasted. Have you every stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? However, there is one week that changed our world forever, Holy Week! On the Christian calendar Holy Week is the last week of Lent, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending at dawn on Easter. It is the week the church remembers the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry. It recalls the expectations of Palm Sunday, the rejection of Maundy Thursday, the devastation of Good Friday and the final victory of Easter morning.

This is Palm Sunday, and on this day we remember how Jesus bravely rode into the Golden City, Jerusalem, to observe his final Passover. His sinless state made him the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. Each one of the Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) record the event because it signaled the beginning of the end. Our scripture lesson for today is from Mark's version, Mark 11:1-11. Let me call this message this morning *Why the Cheering Stopped*.

Mark 11:1-11 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

¹⁰ "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹¹ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

The Rogers Centre is located in the city of Toronto. You may know it by its original name, the Skydome. It is a multi-purpose stadium, which originally opened in 1989. At that time it gained instant fame because it was the first stadium with a fully retractable motorized roof. It is the home to the American League's Toronto Blue Jays and the Canadian Football League's Toronto Argonauts. However, neither team holds the record for the largest crowd at the Rogers Centre. Do you know who holds that record?

The largest crowd ever to assemble at the Rogers Centre, 72,500, came to see Billy Graham. The second largest crowd, 68,237, gathered at the Rogers Centre to witness the World Wrestling Federation's Wrestlemania X8. I like that little fact. You don't usually get to say Billy Graham and the Wrestlemania X8 in the same sentence. How many people do you think went to both events?

A great crowd had gathered in the city of Jerusalem. It was time for the Passover. The law required the people to come, but no legislation was necessary. Everyone wanted to be part of the great holiday. It was a time to do three things. First, they made their annual animal sacrifice at the temple. Second, they paid their annual taxes. Third, it was a time to reconnect with family and friends. It is for that reason everyone wanted to be in Jerusalem for the Passover. It has been estimated that the population of Jerusalem swelled to 2,500,000 on that particular Passover, and the name on everyone's lips was Jesus. You know the story.

Jesus rode into the city on a donkey to describe something that he could not communicate. Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. The people celebrated that fact. However, it is at this point the story grows dim. The crowd expected a political Messiah. We have looked at this point in the past. They had grown tired of foreign domination. They wanted a Messiah that would lead a political revolution. They chanted political slogans and waved palms like he was a conquering hero. This is the problem. They missed the memo! Jesus didn't come for military action. Jesus came to offer the people a relationship with God. Their expectations of the Messiah and the reality of the Messiah could not coexist. In the end, the cheers of Palm Sunday were replaced with the tears of Good Friday.

Today, I want to answer this question: why did the cheering stop? There are probably many reasons why. I only have time for three. We find each one of those reasons alive in our world today. Maybe you know of someone who has stopped cheering Jesus? Maybe there has been a time in your life that you stopped cheering Jesus? So if you are ready to answer the question, why did the cheering stop, say, "**Hosanna!**"

Sensationalism

Do you remember Ted Williams? Not the Hall of Fame baseball player, the homeless Ohio man with the golden voice. His story really was incredible, a YouTube sensation. An Ohio photographer filmed him holding a homemade sign promoting his voice. He was looking for a job as a radio or television spokesman. Because of that footage he was discovered. Ted appeared on all the talk shows. Everyone was talking about him. The height of his fame came when the Cleveland Cavaliers offered him a job as their spokesman; part of his compensation was a house. The problem is, fame is fleeting. As fast as his stock rose, his stock fell. He tried to defeat his old demons, alcohol and crack. However, it appears he is losing that battle. He checked himself out of a rehab clinic in Texas. Today, Ted Williams now lives in the Columbus, Ohio area and is struggling to pay his pills. He illustrates one point. Fame is fleeting! Maybe that is the story of Jesus?

The cheering stopped because the sensationalism was over. Some in the crowd cheered because Jesus had grabbed the spotlight. The population had heard the stories of the miracles, so some ran to the gate to simply see Jesus. Perhaps, they wanted to see a miracle in person? Or perhaps, they just wanted to be there. On that Palm Sunday Jesus was a celebrity. The problem is, celebrity status does not last long. Do you know of anyone who has to be part of the action? If you do, say, "**Hosanna!**"

Selfishness

There is an old preaching story about a rabbi who was visiting a friend. He took the friend to a window and asked him what he saw. The friend replied, "I see men, women and children." Then he took his friend to a mirror and asked, "What do you see now?" The friend replied, "I see myself!" The rabbi replied, "That is the choice we must make in life! Are we going to look through the window and see others? Or are we going to look at the mirror and only see ourselves?" You are a disciple of Jesus Christ! You have no choice. Jesus looked through the window and saw the needs of this world. You must look through the window and do the same.

The cheering stopped because some were selfish. There is a surplus of selfishness in our world; there always has been. Some of the people in the crowd cheered Jesus because they wanted something from him. They saw potential for their agenda. He had the power to perform miracles. He had a charismatic personality. He had all the tools to be a powerful leader. They hoped that Jesus would use those tools to lead a great revolution, expelling the Romans. They were selfish. They wanted something from Jesus, but he didn't produce. They stopped cheering because Jesus disappointed them. Do you know of anyone who expects Jesus to act in a certain way? Do you know of anyone who is disappointed in Jesus? If you do, then you know of someone who is selfish. Can I state the obvious? There are many selfish people in our world. Some of the people in the crowd stopped cheering because Jesus didn't give them what they wanted. Do you know of anyone who is mad at God because God didn't give them what they wanted? And all of God's people said, "**Hosanna!**"

Short-Sightedness

Traditionally, during the season of Lent we look at Jesus' temptation. It is found in the fourth chapter of Matthew 4. According to the text, Jesus has just been baptized. The Spirit suddenly leads him to the desert to be tempted by the devil. Jesus fasts for forty days, so he is hungry. In that weakened state Jesus is tempted three times. First, he is tempted to change the stones into bread. Second, he is tempted to throw himself off the highest point of the temple. Third, he is tempted with the very best this world has to offer. Those three temptations symbolize all the temptations; security, popularity and power. Each time Jesus refuses the temptation. Why? Because, each temptation deals with the temporary; Jesus is interested in the eternal. We live in a world that has become preoccupied with the temporary. There is a balance that must be respected between the temporary and the eternal. How many people do you know who are living out of balance?

The cheering stopped because some were short-sighted. The crowd was interested in the temporary, revolution! Jesus was interested in eternity salvation! Jesus knew what was

going to happen in the week to follow, the cross. However, Jesus also knew how the cross was going to change God's relationship with the world forever. How many people do you know who have become preoccupied with the temporary? Can I ask you a question? Are your children's schedules filled with things that will make them ready for the temporary? Things like sports, music lessons and dance. Are your children's schedules filled with things that will prepare them for the eternal? I was always proud when I saw children marching down the field on a Friday night. That was a good thing. However, I do not know how I could enjoy heaven if they were absent. Some in the crowd stopped cheering because they were short-sighted. And all of God people said, "**Hosanna!**"

Annually, I attend the Mahoning Valley Spring District Conference of the United Methodist Church. Our district is made up of 67 congregations. It was an afternoon filled with reports and voting. This year, it is scheduled at Canfield on April 19. On that particular year, it was held at Warren Grace. It lived up to my expectations. When the meeting ended, a woman came up to me and said, "Did you go to McKinley School?" I said, "Yes!" McKinley was my elementary school. She said, "I was your first grade teacher!" I drew a blank. I had to look at her name tag. Her name is Mary Fuller. I thought, "Are you still alive?" I said, "You were a lot taller in those days." We talked for a few moments and then it was over.

As I drove home I thought about Mrs. Fuller. I only have one clear recollection of the first grade. It was November of 1963. The public address system crackled on. I can still hear our principle's voice telling the school that President Kennedy had been killed in Dallas. I remember Mrs. Fuller walking out of the classroom and into the hall. She gathered with the other teachers. They were talking, then something happened that caught me off guard. I can remember one of the teachers began to cry. I don't think I will ever forget that sound. Maybe we give too much attention to crowds? Maybe we don't give enough attention to tears?

The crowd cheered on Palm Sunday; the faithful cried on Good Friday. On Friday evening we are going to gather at Green Haven Memorial Gardens. It is one of our local cemeteries. For what it is, it is a very nice place. But, what is it? It is a place for the dead. Some people won't go because it is a cemetery. However, I think it is a place we have to go. We will underscore the fact that Jesus died. We will read the final words he uttered and remember his pain. It is five days from now, but I know what I will hear when I leave. It happens every year. As I walk through the silent crowd I will hear someone crying. It will hit them like a ton of bricks, Jesus died for them! Jesus died for us! Jesus died for you and me. There will be no cheers on Friday evening, only tears.

On that first Palm Sunday the people cheered, but then the cheering stopped. Why? The cheering stopped because the **sensationalism** was over. Fame is fleeting. The cheering stopped because some were **selfish**. Sometimes God doesn't fulfill our expectations. The cheering stopped because some were **short-sighted**. Palm Sunday is not about now; Palm Sunday is about eternity. Is it better to cheer for Jesus today, or cry for Jesus on Friday?

Will you all please pray with me?