

"JESUS, DID YOU SEE ME WAVE?"

INTRODUCTION

The springboard for today's sermon comes from a line in the Rock Opera, "Jesus Christ Superstar". It's a line sung by the crowd as Jesus rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

"Christ you know I love you,
Did you see I waved?
I believe in you and God,
So tell me that I'm saved."

Over the years that Palm Sunday crowd has not always been treated with kindness. There have been those who have described it as a rather fickle mob - misguided in its messianic expectations, more intent on celebrating a holiday than a Holy Day, theologically shallow and howling for the blood of this same man before the week was out.

SOME GOOD WORDS

However, I'd like to say a few good words for that crowd. I think it deserves them. After all, those people back there didn't have the benefit of two thousand years of hind-sight. Who knows? It's entirely possible that some of the charter members of the "mother" Church in Jerusalem were out on the streets that day cheering Jesus.

What makes these people stand out as attractive and beautiful to me is the fact that they were sufficiently free to act on the deeper impulse to rejoice in God. Parades, of course, have a way of stirring up the emotions and temporarily releasing us from some of our inhibitions. The people that day managed to forget themselves in a wonderful way; they let go and cheered.

Ramsey Clark told of an incident that's worth repeating. Several years ago, at the time of Whitney Young's death, the motorcade that was taking Young's body to its burial place passed through a town in the state of Kentucky. As it moved through that town at an unhurried pace, he remembered there was a little girl in her mother's arms who kept cupping and uncupping her hands. As the car in which Ramsey Clark was sitting went by, she whispered, "Mommie told me that I shouldn't wave". Even under those somber circumstances the heart felt the need to express itself and she could do no other.

THE CROWD THAT DAY

Perhaps we're wrong to sit in judgement on those first Palm Sunday enthusiasts. There was much shouting. Much cheering. Much running about. It's true that no one maintains his dignity while running except an athlete. Remember how you looked the last time you chased the subway as its doors were closing.

Waving palm branches is not exactly prescribed behavior. Garments were taken off and placed on the donkey...some placed on the path as the little procession made its way to the gate of the city. Here we sit on Palm Sunday, in our opulent respectability, looking in judgement on them because they dared to let go and express their joy and enthusiasm for One who had made a difference in their lives. We who perhaps have never shouted a single "hurrah" for Jesus, who have never gone out of our way to speak an enthusiastic way regarding Him to a friend.

Halford Luccock who use to teach seminarians at Yale Divinity School with whimsy and point said it this way:

"I was impressed several years ago that Eugene Ormandy dislocated a shoulder while leading the Philadelphia Orchestra. I do not know what they were playing. Certainly not Mozart. Perhaps it was Stravinsky. But at any rate, he was giving all of himself to it. And I have asked myself sadly, 'Did I ever dislocate anything - even a necktie?'"

WHAT IS IT? What is it that holds us back, that keeps us so tightly wound up that our religion appears to the on-looker to be a rather somber, joyless matter?

Have we sold our sense of wonder for security? Is that it? Or, is it that we've learned as we've grown older and richer that one gets along better in this world if one keeps his hosannas to himself? I wonder.

Some of them that day took off their garments and waved them. Does our proper dress keep us from entering upon the glory that we see? If so, it may be then that some are paying a high price for sartorial respectability!

Or, is it that we lack confidence in our ability to know the praiseworthy when we see it? You know how it is. Some people are afraid to say whether they enjoyed a book or a movie until they see what the "key" reviewers have had to say about it.

At times, we tend to be like a bevy of docile tourists on a guided trip. We like to have the world's great sights catalogued and "starred" for us so that we will know where and when and what to look at. I'm sure that Moses whom our Jewish friends will be thinking about this week when he saw the burning bush did not turn and ask, "Now...I wonder...is this one of the seven wonders of the Sinai Peninsula". He turned aside to see and stayed in worship.

Or, can it be that we have grown so dull and immune to real faith that mere "words about" have become a substitute for the real thing? There is a danger. Words - as symbols of the real - can keep us from experiencing the real!

Remember Kierkegaard's story of the geese sequestered in a yard. Every 7th day these geese paraded to a corner of the yard and their most eloquent orator got up on the fence and spoke of the wonders of the geese. He told them of the exploits of the forefathers who dared to "mount up on wings" and fly all over the sky. He spoke of the mercy of the Creator who had given geese wings and the instinct to fly. This deeply impressed the geese who nodded their heads solemnly. All this they did. But one thing they did not do - they did not fly! For the corn was good and the barnyard was safe and secure.

"Christ you know I love you.
Did you see I waved?"

MEETING THE GLORY Along with the spray of palm that you take home with you today, I should like to ask that you also take home two lessons or two thoughts as well.

The first is this: meet any glory that you happen on half way. Go out to it. Meet it half way. When you see glory passing by - bend to it, bend with it. I often think we tend to stay "underwhelmed" because we refuse to allow ourselves to be "overwhelmed" by the magnitude of the love of God. Seize the

moment, even if it makes you late for some appointment.

Remember Zaccheus? When he heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho he shut down his tax office and then climbed a tree so that he might have a good view of Jesus passing by. That day changed his life. Remember Martha? She was so intent on her kitchen chores, getting the meal served on time that she missed out on an unrepeatable chance to enjoy the company of her Lord. Learn to go out of your way to meet the glory. Respond to it as it passes. Put the glory first.

RESPECT YOUR ENCOUNTERS

of your life.

And the other lesson is this: respect and regard your encounters with God as the truest indication

Let's face it: we tend to be suspicious of those luminous, rapturous moments - to downgrade them, to see them as harmless interludes in an otherwise rational and well-ordered life. The testimony of the saints and of many others is that we should disbelieve more often those strict, logical and rational moments of our lives and be more trusting of our moments of vision. This is when you are really you! - when the fires of the Eternal are present and at work in your life.

When we think about our own private experiences of great joy, we're apt to say half-apologetically... "we... I guess I was beside myself". No - you weren't. That was your truest self - and when these liberating times of high exhilaration comes to us, we should meet them at least halfway, and respect and revere and regard and remember them as valid, sure indication of life. There is this "knowledge" of the heart.

PASCAL / FIRE

It was on Monday night, November 23rd, 1654, that the brilliant French physicist and philosopher, Blaise Pascal, was reading his Bible. Suddenly, he said, the room became illuminated. He could only think to describe this encounter with God in terms of FIRE - double exclamation point!! He wrote,

"God of Abraham, God of Issac, God of Jacob - not of the philosophers and scholars. Certitude, certitude, feelings, joy! peace! God of Jesus Christ!"

He wrote out two copies of this experience, one on parchment and one on paper, and sewed them into the lining of his coat so that he could remember that moving, luminous moment that transformed his life and shaped the balance of his years.

"Christ you know I love you,
Did you see I waved."

CLOSING SECTION

A veteran student of business management had noted that,

"When one first joins the ranks of management, he has zero experience and 100% enthusiasm. By the time one dies or retires, his mixture is 100% experience and zero enthusiasm. In between these extremes, there is a relatively short time in one's career when he has the optimum of both experience and enthusiasm.

That's what we're looking for - the optimum of experience and enthusiasm,

blended together...to keep alive our Biblical faith and heritage in this city. For in spite of rejection after rejection, He still comes to us, just as He came to the people of Jerusalem long ago. He comes to us today, to many of us, ~~xxxx~~, seeking a decision. He comes calling to people to forget themselves, to take a stand, to stand up and to cheer for Him and for all He has come to represent in life. "As this city goes, so goes the nation"

"Jesus, did you see I waved?" And perhaps we hear Him answer softly and quietly.

"I've seen you study....worship...serve...give, but come to think of it, I've never see you wave. Why? What's holding you back? Let go...let God...see what happens."

PRAYER Lord, we covert the freedom to respond to You with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Forgive us our caution, our self-consciousness, our fear of spontaniety. Forgive us for the hosannas that languish on our lips. Make us glad, radiant, enthusiastic followers of Jesus, for In Him we see You breaking through to us. In his name we pray. Amen

"JESUS, DID YOU SEE ME WAVE?"

INTRODUCTION

It isn't likely that the Rock Opera "Jesus Christ Superstar" will any time soon make the world forget Handel's "Messiah" or Stainer's "Crucifixion". On the other hand, only a few I think would refuse to concede that Andrew Webber and Tom Rice have a warm and wonderful way of bringing the passion narrative to life. For people like Mary Magdalene, Judas Iscariot, and Pontius Pilot, glimpsed from new and creative angles, seem as real as the folks we saw on the Ten O'Clock News last night.

The springboard for today's sermon comes from a line in "Jesus Christ Superstar" that is sung by the crowd as Jesus rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday:

"Christ you know I love you,
Did you see I waved?
I believe in you and God
So tell me that I'm saved"
(repeat)

DEVELOPMENT

Over the years that first Palm Sunday crowd has not fared well at the hands of Christians. We have been less than kind to it at times. Sometimes it has been described to us as a rather fickle mob, somewhat misguided in its messianic expectations, more intent on celebrating holidays than Holy Days; theologically rather shallow...howling for his blood a few days later on GF.

To my way of thinking the crowd deserves something better than. After all, those people that day didn't have the benefit of two thousand years of hind-sight. If they were confused about their "Coming One" - what shall we say about the lack of clarity and the depth of understanding regarding Jesus and his expectations in the Christian Church today? Fickle? At times. Low in loyalty? Maybe. Shallow in conviction and lacking in deeds? Perhaps. We need to judge them carefully, for we are not without some of their faults. And I have the feeling that perhaps when all the facts are in we will discover that many of the charter members of the mother church in Jerusalem had been a part of that crowd that day long ago when people stood up and cheered for Jesus as He rode into the City of Jerusalem.

WHAT MAKES THEM ATTRACTIVE

What makes these people stand out as attractive and beautiful to me is the fact that they were sufficiently free to act on the impulse to rejoice in God. Parades, of course, have a way of doing this, of stirring up the emotions and temporarily releasing us from some of our inhibitions. Their demonstration was marked by a rare measure of self-forgetfulness.

Ramsey Clark, speaking over at the Stanley Issacs Community Center last May, shortly after Whitney Young's death, said that one of the most touching and moving parts of the motorcade that bore the body of Whitney Young for him occurred down in Kentucky. He described a little girl in her mother's arms who kept cupping and uncupping her hands. And as Mr. Clark's car went by, she whispered: "Mommie told me that I shouldn't wave". But even under those somber circumstances, the heart felt the need to express itself and she could do no other.

Perhaps we are wrong to sit in judgment on those first Palm Sunday enthusiasts. There was much shouting. There was much cheering. There was much running about. And I suppose it's true that no one maintains his dignity while running except an athlete. Remember how you looked the last time you chased a subway as its doors were closing. The waving of palm branches is not exactly prescribed behavior.

On Monday evening, November 23rd, 1654, a brilliant French physicist and philosopher was reading his Bible. Suddenly the whole room became illuminated. The man's name was Blaise Pascal. He could only think to describe this encounter with God in terms of FIRE - double exclamation point!!

"God of Abraham, God of Issac, God of Jacob - not of the philosophers and scholars. Certitude, certitude, feeling, joy, peace, God of Jesus Christ".

Blaise Pascal, you may recall, wrote out two copies of this experience, one on parchment and one on paper, and sewed them into the lining of his coat so that he could remember the luminous moment that transformed his life and shaped the balance of his years. this high, luminous moment.

"Christ you know I love you,
Did you see I waved".

A veteran student of business management has noted that:

"When one first joins the ranks of management, he has zero experience and 100 percent enthusiasm. By the time one dies or retires, his mixture is 100 percent experience and zero enthusiasm. In between these extremes, there is a relatively short time in one's career when he has the optimum of both experience and enthusiasm."

That's what we're looking for, isn't it. The optimum combination of experience and enthusiasm in keeping alive the Christian interpretation of life in this city....and in our churches. For He still comes to us, just as He came to the people of the city of Jerusalem long ago....He comes, seeking a decision....calling to men to forget stand up and cheer for him. themselves, and to

"Jesus, did you see me wave?" And perhaps we can hear him answer softly,

"I've seen you study.....worship.....serve.....give.....
but come to think of it, I've never seen you wave.....
why.....is something holding you back.....let go and
see what happens....."

LET US PRAY Lord, we covet the freedom to respond to thee with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Forgive us our caution, our acute self-consciousness, our fear of spontaniety, the hosannas that languish on our lips. Make us, we pray thee, glad and contagiously radiant followers of Jesus Christ, for it is in his name we ask this. Amen