

PLMSUN.A

PALM SUNDAY

March 16, 2008

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Philippians 2:5-11

Matthew 21:1-11

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21 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' ⁴This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, ⁵Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' ¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' ¹¹The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

I knew a fellow who was an expert on the philosopher Immanuel Kant. He used to quote Kant all the time - accurately when he was sober. He would refer to what Kant had to say on this subject or that. He would talk about his writings. One time I asked him when he had decided to be such a disciple of Immanuel Kant. He laughed, and said, "On no. I'm not a disciple; I'm just a fan. I admire Kant. A *disciple* would try to be like him."

He was right. A disciple would have worked to practice the discipline of thinking...of following principles through to conclusions. A disciple would have based his life and actions on the conclusions he reached. A *fan* has no such responsibilities. A fan just has to observe and be entertained.

It's that way in all areas where we admire people. We can admire a singer or a football player, but we don't take voice lessons or start getting in shape to win a pro contract.

A fan is someone who admires, enjoys – someone who is entertained. A disciple is someone who tries to follow his teacher. Someone who tries to make his life different because of the person he is following.

Being a fan is more popular than being a disciple because it is a lot easier. You can admire someone who gets good grades without having any desire to study. You can compliment someone who prepares a good meal without ever going into a kitchen.

We can talk about the great gift that God sent into this world as Jesus Christ to forgive sin...without ever desiring to forgive anybody ourselves. We can praise God for sending us the perfect teacher without trying to teach anyone else. We can stand in awe of God's love and never love God's creatures.

We can be fans of Jesus, easily. We are called to be disciples.

On the first Palm Sunday Jesus had come to Jerusalem. He rode into the capital city - and he had lots of fans. The Gospel reads, "A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those who followed were shouting: 'Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil..."

It sounds a little like how people act when a movie star steps out of a limousine.

Jesus had a lot of fans. He wanted disciples.

He rode into Jerusalem. Lots of admirers. The crowd went wild. Later he went into the temple. He upset things and a few people started to get uncomfortable. He started telling people they were wrong. He said they would have to change. Jesus didn't want to be admired as much as he wanted to be followed.

All during the week Jesus kept coming after the people, challenging, preaching, healing. He demanded to be a part of every aspect of every life. He came into town. He came into the temple. He came into peoples' lives. He just kept coming.

We know the story of Holy Week, the story that begins with Palm Sunday. Jesus' demands were too much for his fans - and it turned out he didn't have very many disciples.

We have gathered this morning because God has come into our lives. In some form or another, we are here because God has come into our lives just as surely as he came into Jerusalem on a Sunday morning.

Most of us know something about the Bible, something about the sacraments. You know that God created you. You have heard that God loves you. These are the ways God has come into your life.

We all admire God for that. We worship God; we praise him. We are blessed because God consoles us in times of pain. He reassures us in our doubt. He forgives sin. He gives us strength and courage.

We worship him. We especially worship him on Palm Sunday. There is nothing hypocritical about this morning's service. Just as there was nothing hypocritical about the worship the people were giving on the first Palm Sunday. When they shouted "Hosanna"! they meant it. They were praising Jesus. When we sing God's praises, when we teach our children to hold their palm branches, we are not endorsing hypocrisy. We are endorsing the praise of God as the right thing to do.

We need to praise; we need to celebrate. God has come into our lives as Jesus Christ.

But there is a lesson here. We know the rest of the story. We know how Jesus called his fans to be disciples. He called them to change and be like him. He called them to join him as partners in this week that would cost him his life - and defeat death.

He calls us to give him our lives.

Fans, admirers, are good. We need to do that. But, when the crowd that was so wildly excited on Palm Sunday no longer found Jesus enjoyable, they left. There was no thought that they should change themselves and follow him. They were not going to lose their lives by giving them over to a Christ-like life. That was not enjoyable nor entertaining. Jesus started to make people downright uncomfortable. He was on the cross five days later.

Everybody admires God. No one objects to what Jesus accomplished. A man who consoles us in our pain. Gives us strength and courage. Forgives our sin. Jesus still has fans.

We are called this morning to look at the people around us and console them in times of pain, just as Jesus does. A disciple is the source of strength and courage, just as Jesus is. A disciple forgives people who sin against him, just as we admire Jesus for doing.

Let's worship God. It's the right thing to do. Let's admire Jesus. But Jesus will not stop with admiration. He wants you. He wants you to grow and keep growing every day for the rest of your life. The journey of Jesus - started on Palm Sunday - will not end until Jesus is dead...that is also what he has in mind for us. As disciples, we are called to live as disciples everyday between here and the grave.

That will take our entire lives, but that's all right. We have a life to spend. We can afford it.

We join ourselves to God. We let Jesus Christ live in us. We are disciples. No one knows where Jesus might lead. No one knows what will come up in our lives. Experience tells us that it won't all be good.

There will be days like we have this morning. Celebrations. There will be accomplishments. A lot of happiness. The way can also be hard. When the promise of celebration and entertainment started to fade, Jesus' fans left him. They were down to a few by Thursday evening's supper. Fewer still by after dinner prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was arrested - and of the handful left no one would admit it.

When it came time to confront death itself, Jesus was alone. But the entire purpose of Jesus coming to us - the whole cause of God's coming alive in our lives is this: Jesus defeated death.

The fans, the admirers, who distanced themselves from Jesus when he confronted death, were still distant from him when he defeated death.

We can be more than fans. We can be disciples. We can join Jesus in his fight against death and we can be part of the defeat of death. It is when the way is hard that we need to be with Jesus. When we are discouraged, and people hurt us, and we lose direction, or we are bored, or ill, or lonely that is when we most need the love of God through Jesus.

When our faith, our discipleship, is not entertaining. When Christ calls for obedience, when Christ calls for our lives to be lived following him. That is when we know the struggle against death. And we know the power of Jesus overcoming death.

Jesus overcomes death with life. When we live in obedience, in discipleship, he overcomes death in our lives.

Jesus comes alive in this world by living in his disciples. It starts with admiration, but Jesus needs disciples. He needs you. This world needs people who learn the will of God...and then do it. People who change and grow. People who are willing to make uncomfortable decisions about what they are going to do with their energy, and time, and money. People who are going to take a stand about right and wrong.

That's what Jesus is riding into town for. As happy as the moment is, he's coming to do battle with death. Fighting the power of sin and death is not always popular. It won't always win you a lot of fans.

Be more than just a fan. No matter how much you admire Christ from a distance - you are still at a distance. Separated from God in the battle against death, and separated from God in his victory over death.

Be a disciple. Follow Jesus. Let him change your life everyday. His Kingdom needs life.

It needs your life lived with God.