

## A Place in the Crowd

April 05, 2020

Matthew 21:1-11

I invite you all to recall the last moment you were in a crowd. Perhaps it was at a sporting event of some sort. Maybe it was a rally or a protest. Maybe it was more celebratory, like a wedding or a funeral. Perhaps it was a parade of some kind. Maybe it was something else. Regardless, there is a certain energy when people are congregated that is transferred from one person to the next. You may not be the biggest fan of the team you're there to root on or celebrate with a parade, but in that moment, you become a fan. Their successes bring you real excitement, and their failures bring you real disappointment. You may not have known the people getting married well, but you can still feel the love and support the crowd has for the betrothed, and in the moment, you feel like you've known them forever, and therefore, you love and support them as much as everyone else. You may not have known the dearly departed well, but seeing the mourning and sense of loss from those around you, you still feel a sense of having lost something. This transference of energy is much the same as what happened with Jesus' "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem.

Jesus comes riding in on a donkey and its colt. As he moved through the streets, people are laying down palm branches and coats at his feet as if to roll out their "red carpet" for him, signifying him as a person of importance. The disciples are presumably in front of and behind Jesus, creating a parade of sorts. Whenever I hear this story, I imagine Jesus waving to the men, women, and children that line the streets as he passes by, a giant smile on his face. Mind you, I also imagine the crowd throwing confetti, so, take my image with a grain of salt. Regardless, the crowd is cheering, shouting "Hosanna," literally "save us." Some in that crowd don't know this Jesus fellow, but hearing he is a "descendent of David" and "the one who comes in the name of the Lord," seeing the branches and coats being lain out before him, they begin cheering too. They get excited, feeding off the energy of those around them, and really getting in the spirit of things. Mind you though, this is the same crowd that, shortly thereafter, were shouting, "Crucify him!" to Pontius Pilate. So, those who celebrate Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem also call for his torture and execution. Why is this? Well, there are a couple reasons.

One of the biggest reasons people turned on him as they did was because he turned out not to be who they thought he was. They were throwing their coats and palm branches down on the road, a custom generally associated with kings and warriors who have just triumphed in battle, who have defeated a great enemy. Jesus, though he had not defeated anyone as of yet, was viewed in similar terms. The Jews believed that the Messiah was going to be this great warrior king, one who would tear down the powers that be, in this case Caesar and the Roman Empire. They thought Jesus was going to physically battle the Romans and lead Israel to victory, freeing them from Roman rule. This however was not the enemy from whom Jesus came to free the Jews.

Jesus came not to free them from the Romans, but from Sin and Death, these great powers that have ruled the Children of God far longer than the Roman Empire. Soon, Jesus is betrayed, arrested, and brought before not just the religious authorities but Pontius Pilate himself. Where once the crowd thought it was personally beneficial to rally behind this "savior king", that

personal benefit has died. Now, it's personally beneficial to side with the religious leaders and Rome, to not "stick their neck out" as it were. So, in an instant, just as their perception of who Jesus is changed, so too did their allegiance, a resounding example of how short-sighted humanity can be in the grand scheme of things. This however is not the only reason they turn on him.

Another reason people turned on him so quickly was, again, because of that collective energy off of which everyone was feeding. The crowd gathered at this "triumphal entry" are shouting "hosanna," celebrating the arrival of this "savior king." People who have not the slightest clue in the world what's going on join in, getting excited themselves because of all the excitement around them. Then, later, the Pharisees start the chanting off, they turn the people on Jesus, and that collective energy starts building. Soon, everyone except Jesus' disciples, wanting to be a part of the crowd, to not be singled out, join in with shouting "Crucify him!", some of the people in the crowd not having the slightest knowledge of *why* Jesus should be crucified or *who* Jesus is. Jesus seems to understand this though, praying from the Cross, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do."

All it took was a moment to change the emotional energy within the crowd. When it was no longer beneficial to celebrate Jesus, becoming then beneficial to condemn him, the crowd followed the trend of what was personally beneficial. Those who had not the slightest clue what was going on in either case, they fed off of the energy of the crowd around them, assuming that these people knew what they were doing. So, they celebrated when the crowd was cheering, and they jeered when the crowd was jeering. However, something to bear in mind: Jesus knew the hardship that was to come, but he didn't lose faith. His disciples had been forewarned about the hardship to come, and on the whole, they remained faithful. This raises an interesting thought then of "Where are we in this scene?" Are we in the crowd, cheering along and going through the motions because everyone else is making these same motions and we want to feel like a part of something greater? Are we a member of the crowd that understands what this means and go through the motions simply because it is personally beneficial to do what we're doing? Or, are we walking along with Jesus, knowledgeable of what is yet to come yet present because of our own will and out dedication? This is an interesting thought I invite you all to consider as we start off this Holy week: where are you in the crowd?