

Sunday, March 25, 2018 – Palm Sunday
“Leaving Clamor Behind”

John 12: 12-19

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Story Framed Structure

Adapted from CSL “Leave It Behind”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Palm Sunday and Jesus rides into Jerusalem. “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13). Wow, the crowds were ecstatic! But today is also called the “Sunday of the Passion,” because by the end of the week the crowds are shouting, “Crucify him!” (Mark 15:14). Have you ever wondered why the crowd changed its tune? I’ve thought about that a lot. The Bible doesn’t explicitly tell us but we can make several intelligent guesses. One reason may be that there were two largely different crowds. Another reason, and I’m pretty confident about this one, was that the religious leaders stirred up the crowd. We know that the establishment boys were upset by all the fanfare when Jesus rode into town. Jesus and His adoring crowds were threatening their cozy, little churchly kingdom. So they planted their goons in the crowd. They may well have paid the rabble rousers; we know they paid off Judas Iscariot. The plants stirred up the crowd, “Crucify him!” and the people, or at least the vocal ones, joined in and carried the day.

While I’ve thought about all that, here’s what really troubles me. How easily people can be swayed! Why should I think that I couldn’t be easily swayed by the crowd? You know what peer pressure is. Why should you think that you won’t be swayed by the crowd and do something that is wrong, something that is unfaithful to your God and Savior? We’ll be confirming our young people on April 29th. Confirmation is a church ceremony that gives young people the opportunity to reaffirm the faith that was given to them when they were baptized. Confirmation is a great day but we know what can happen. The hosannas sung on confirmation day fade as time goes on. Young people meet real life and sadly, many of them depart from their baptismal faith. Hosannas become indifference, and indifference crucifies Jesus. It’s not just young people. You and I can be swayed. We can be swayed by strong voices. We can be swayed by peer pressure. Remember Peter, in the court yard of the High Priest? He caved. It happened to him; it can happen to us. The crowd can make us forget our Savior.

Not 100% of the people gave in to the peer pressure. Have you ever noticed in meetings that some people talk more than others? That's not necessarily a complaint, although too much talking from a few people can intimidate others who have something to share. There are people who quietly watch what's going on. That's true today and that was true that first Holy Week. One such person back then was Nicodemus. John tells us, "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night" (John 3:1–2). Why did Nicodemus come by night? Maybe, maybe because he didn't want the religious thugs to see him. They might crucify him on Facebook or Twitter. Anyway, Nicodemus came and asked Jesus questions. The most memorable thing that Jesus told him was this. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). That seems to have seeped down into Nicodemus' heart. Listen to what St. John tells us happened after Jesus had died. "Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews..." There's your peer pressure again! "Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes . . . So they took the body of Jesus..." (John 19:38–40). Scholars believe that the change from darkness to light... Nicodemus first went to Jesus in the dark and now he comes for the body of Jesus in the light. Scholars believe that is St. John's subtle way of saying Nicodemus came to faith in Jesus.

Here's my point: Nicodemus left behind the clamor of the crowds. He may have been in the crowd when Jesus rode into town. If Nicodemus wasn't there, he heard all about it. When he actually talked to Jesus he had big time questions; he wasn't swayed by the hosanna crowd. And when the crowds clamored for Jesus's crucifixion, Nicodemus wasn't swayed. Nicodemus wasn't swayed because he was coming to understand why Jesus had come in on Palm Sunday and what the Sunday of the Passion was truly about. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 2:14–15). Nicodemus left behind the clamor of the crowds behind and became absorbed with Jesus.

That's the way you and I have to do it as well. Leave the clamor behind! We're on our way not only to Good Friday but to the eternal Easter. "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19). God is calling us to our true home, our heavenly home with Him. Focus on that; leave the clamor behind. Don't let your outlook be dominated by the Facebook crowd or the Twitter crowd. I'm not saying don't use it but just don't be dominated by it. Don't let your outlook be dominated by social climbers in your personal life or by career climbers in your work life. Don't be swayed by the crowd's clamor for more money or for better homes in the best neighborhood. Don't be swayed by all the deceits of striving for the perfect life here and now. Such noise is all around us; we can't shut it out. We can and should contrast all the noise to the truth we know, Jesus our Savior. Leave the clamor behind.

If you want some motivation to hone in on Jesus, listen to this quotation from the German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

"One extreme thing must be said. To forego self-conceit and to associate with the lowly means, in all soberness and without mincing the matter, to consider oneself the greatest of sinners. This arouses all the resistance of the natural man, but also that of the self-confident Christian. It sounds like an exaggeration, like an untruth. Yet even Paul said of himself that he was the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15); he said this specifically at the point where he was speaking of his service as an apostle. There can be no genuine acknowledgement of sin that does not lead to this extremity. If my sinfulness appear to me to be in any way smaller or less detestable in comparison with the sins of others, I am still not recognizing my sinfulness at all. My sin is of necessity the worst, the most grievous, the most reprehensible. (Life Together, p. 96)

Forget the crowd. You are the chief of sinners. I am the chief of sinners. Actually, I am the "Reverend Chief of Sinners." We need what Jesus gives. Be like Nicodemus. Leave behind the clamor of the crowds and go to Jesus. Amen.