

Palm Sunday, Year A  
Matthew 21: 1-11, 27: 11-54  
March 16, 2008

Trinity Episcopal Church  
Sonoma, California

Two Cries, Two Crowds  
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

How quickly the scene changes; how fast the mood shifts. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem--the crowd lining the sides of the road, throwing down their cloaks to make a for him a carpet fit for a king, crying out as he passes by, "Hosanna – Lord, save us." In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, it all changes. Another procession – a procession to the cross. This time the crowd is yelling, "Crucify him! Crucify him." This time he is surrounded by soldiers of the realm. This time there are none to smooth the path for him.

What a disconnect.

What gives with the crowd – what led them to shift their loyalty? What led them to stifle their hosanna's?

There's so much missing in the Gospel we hear today. The connective tissue is gone. We miss the days between the triumph and the trial and that absence saps the story of its strength.

We get a hint of how the week will go when we hear how people in Jerusalem – another crowd perhaps – respond to what's going on. Roman troops advancing from one side of town and from the other side a rabbi on a donkey surrounded by day laborers, tax collectors, prostitutes, and children singing hosanna. The city is in turmoil, agitated, shaken. No wonder.

The crowd inside the town is totally confused. They do not know this Jesus of Nazareth. Friend or foe – they've yet to make up their minds.

Then Jesus strides into the temple courts, upends the money changers and dove-sellers – fat cats exploiting other people's needs.

He heals the blind and lame – folks excluded from the inner courts, folks others try to avoid.

Jesus' indictment of those in power intensifies. "Woe to you," he says to them, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" Calling them blind guides, whitewashed tombs, snakes, murderers, a brood of vipers.

No wonder the chief priests and elders, the religious and political elites, conspire to arrest him and have him killed. His challenges rock the foundations of their exploitative and oppressive realm exposing the hypocrisy of the temple system and mocking the pretenses of their Roman overlords.

No wonder the people of Jerusalem turn against him. They've been conditioned to believe it's in their best interest to stay on the side of those in power.

Even his disciples begin to question his judgment. One betrays him. Others fall asleep. The rest scatter.

Only the crowds remain – the crowd that has been with him along the way, people on the margin, people pushed aside – and the crowd now forming in Jerusalem, people directly or tangentially dependent on those in power.

Two cries ring out – “Hosanna, Lord save us” and “Crucify him.”

Cries that echo even to this day.

“Hosanna, Lord save us,” we cry when we recognize the truth we can't do it on our own.

“Crucify him,” we cry when look past a pressing human need.

“Hosanna,” when we turn to god and to one another in our suffering and our pain.

“Crucify him,” we cry when we turn our face from the homeless in our path.

This day of disconnect offers us a challenge, a challenge we face time and again in our everyday lives in the choices we make both little and big: Which cry will we utter? Which crowd will we join?