

Palm Sunday

April 1, 2007

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 23:1-49

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Who were those people in Pilate's courtyard shouting, "Crucify Him?" Were they the same people who lined the streets of Jerusalem shouting, "Hosannah to the Son of David" a few days before?

Perhaps, but humanity being what we are, I imagine the great majority of those people shouted, waved their palms, and went home. They said, "What a great parade; that was fun," and went on with their daily lives.

But some probably followed Jesus to see where He was going and what He would do. They had a little time on their hands, and they were curious; they wondered, "Who is He?" Some of the more presentable people might actually have gotten near Him in the Temple when He apparently pitched a fit, toppling tables and releasing sheep and doves and pigeons.

They ran all the way home saying, "That was not fun!" They did, however, have a really good story to tell as they went on with their daily lives.

Then there was a tight little group of twelve and a few more who stayed with Jesus. They had been with Him all the while.

Now do any of those people sound like they were so involved and impassioned that they would reassemble a few days later and call for Jesus' death? Don't they seem like "plain folks," not really involved in the big events around them, simply making their way through one more day? People like that don't change their minds very quickly because daily life is too uncertain and treacherous to take chances.

So perhaps we aren't hearing a story of the fickle, changing nature of humanity; perhaps it's a deeper, darker story.

We usually say that the people turned on Jesus because of dashed expectations. They had an idea that there would be a Messiah, and he would bring instant, total change to their lives and to their world. All their problems and hardships would just evaporate. Israel would be paradise on earth. The future would be bright. Some of them may well have seen Jesus as that sort of Messiah. We can only guess at what they thought, but if that was what they expected, this man processing in triumph through Jerusalem really disappointed them. Nothing they could see had changed. The question is, "Were they so disappointed as to turn on Jesus and demand His death?" Considering how much disappointment they had in their lives, that would be a huge emotional change indeed. Hopes and dreams become highly theoretical the longer they are unanswered.

There are, of course, other people who absolutely hate the thought of the Messiah. They are the comfortable ones. They don't have hardships or problems; life, just as it is, is really, really good. They are doing very well in the Roman occupation and see themselves at least a step above those people in the streets. In fact, it may be the first time they have even been aware of the people in the streets. They have two great fears: that Jesus will show those people in the streets the terrible inequity that reduces some to poverty while others live in riches, and that Jesus will somehow change things. They are the ones who have a great interest in silencing Jesus. Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes. It doesn't matter what we call them.

I really think they are the ones who cry for Jesus' death. The Romans know them; they count on their support. That explains how Pilate, an otherwise shrewd if ruthless governor, would even permit them in his courtyard. It explains how Pilate, who admitted that he saw no guilt in Jesus, would have Him crucified. And it explains how the official after-action report, the spin, on His crucifixion could reduce Jesus to just another prophet.

Those people who had waved their palms in a very brief brush with God Incarnate would never know what truly happened. Life simply went on for them as it always had, nothing changed, or so they thought.

But we know, you and I, that the old world and the old way died on the cross and that all things had changed.

In His Holy Name.