



Lifted Up

The Sixth Week of Lent

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted ... “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

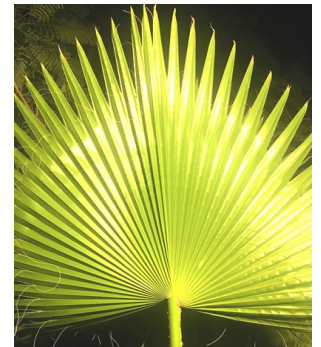
Matthew 21:9

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest ... and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.

Matthew 26:3-4

Two crowds are moving toward each other. One seeks to lift up a king. The other is intent on tearing down a rival. Soon the two crowds will collide, and the crash will echo for all eternity.

The Palm Sunday crowd was made up mostly of Jesus’ followers, from the dedicated disciples to the mildly curious. The crowd of the Sanhedrin no doubt had a similar mix: people virulently opposed to Jesus as well as those who simply weren’t sure about Him. Interestingly, both crowds were focused on Jesus—for good or ill. Yet neither truly understood who and what He was.



Crowds are strange things. Composed of individuals, they take on a life and personality of their own. In the anonymity of a crowd, people lose their inhibitions. People who would never make an exhibition of themselves on their own will freely sing and dance in a crowd. The jubilation of the crowd sweeps over everyone in it. On the flip side, a crowd can quickly become a mob, where individuals lose their moral compass. Looting, violence, and (on the internet) trolling take over. Hidden in the crowd, anything is permissible.

It’s not unusual to find ourselves in a crowd, whether it’s a crowd at a sporting event chanting in support of a team, a crowd at a store pushing forward to buy something, or a Sunday morning crowd, enthusiastically worshipping the Lord. But what comes out in those crowds? Sports fans can go from cheering on their team to smashing windows “in celebration.” Shoppers can trample people to take advantage of a sale. And congregants can go from praising God to spewing vitriol. The palm leaves we wave on Sunday can be formed into a cross on Friday.

Like those first crowds, we don’t truly understand who and what Jesus is. The Trinity is so far beyond our comprehension that we simply take it on faith. And we can dwell in both crowds, lifting up and tearing down, moving between one and the other throughout the course of every day. It is by the grace of God that we spend more time in the worshipping crowd than in the destroying crowd. And it is by His grace that we can raise our hands in praise.



How have I gone along with the crowd in the past week
(for good or ill)?

What can I do today to lift up Jesus?

Exercise:

1. Lift this exercise up to the Lord, asking Him to highlight what He wants you to notice.
2. Read the Bible passage below and try to picture yourself in each situation. Notice how you react to what's happening around you. Do you understand the religious leaders' concerns and fears? How do you react to what they are saying? How do you react to the celebrating crowd and the spontaneous parade as Jesus approaches? What might God be saying through your reactions?
3. Thinking back over the two crowds, do you relate more to the religious leaders or the celebrators? Why? What traits do you see in yourself from each crowd? Sit quietly for a bit and allow God to speak to you.
4. Finally, spend a few minutes thanking God for how He works in your life and asking Him if there are other ways He wants you to experience Him.

⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

"What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation."

⁴⁹ Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." ...

⁵³ So from that day on they plotted to take his life. ⁵⁷ ... [They] had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

¹² ...The great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

"Hosanna"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed is the king of Israel!"...

¹⁷ Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸ Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

John 11:47-50, 53, 57 & John 12:12-13, 17 (NIV)