

What Shall We Do With This Jesus?
PALM SUNDAY
March 16, 2008
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Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
Matthew 21:1-11

“when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred,
saying, ‘Who is this?’”
Matthew 21:10

On this day long ago, Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem.

Churches all over the world try to make this Sunday special.

Many churches hand out palms, as we do.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he entered more than a city like Washington, D.C. or State College.

Jerusalem was special.

Many of the people of Jesus' day referred to Jerusalem as the "umphalos," the "navel" of the world.

Physically, the holy hill of Jerusalem rises out of the belly of the earth – and was thought to be the one place where earth and heaven were joined, as with a celestial umbilical cord.

It sounds rather disrespectful to describe the hill of the Temple as God's belly button; but that's what many people called it.

The place where earth was joined to God.

If it had not been for Jerusalem, the life juices of God would never have fed the earth.

Even today, Christian shrines, Moslem shrines, Jewish shrines like jewels bedeck the holy mount that is Jerusalem, perhaps indicating the continuing belief that none of the spiritual juices (?) would course through the earth now if not for this place!

But remember – wherever the light of God shines strongest, just there will the powers of darkness and opposition also gather.

In Jerusalem on Palm Sunday all the principalities and powers of darkness, visible and invisible, physical and spiritual, were gathered together asking, "What shall we do with this Jesus?"

Shop owners, money lenders, traders acted out the mysterious ebbs and flows, recessions and inflations of the spirit of Mammon – money wondered what to do with Jesus. Buying, selling, trading, making deals. What could Jesus be to them but trouble?

Legal minds, political souls, and scrolls and scrolls of bureaucracy fluttered to the spirits in the city – spirits of power, control, negotiation, manipulation, one-upsmanship wondered what to do with Jesus. What could Jesus be to them but trouble?

The power of religion was concentrated then, as now, in Jerusalem. "The Holy City" they called it, as we do.

People went to Jerusalem to be healed. They traveled long distances to the holy hill to pray. Sins were forgiven in that city. People went to Jerusalem to die, to be buried on the Mt of Olives, where they would be first in line for the resurrection at the last day.

Powers to worship, to sacrifice, to pronounce judgment, to punish sins, to mediate God to the earth, were concentrated in that city and its Temple. What could Jesus be to them but trouble?

All these powers were swirling around in Jerusalem as Jesus approached its gates – riding on a donkey – Hosanna ringing in the air.

Religion power.

People power.

Tyrant's power.

World powers visible and invisible wondered what to do with this Jesus.

When he entered the city with Hosannas' ringing they heard, they wondered.

When garments were spread, when palm branches were waved, they wondered.

The Hosannas had awakened deep, dark fears among the powers of this earth.

The powers would answer the hosannas somehow.

They had to do something to silence the hosannas, to silence this Jesus.

Jesus had entered a kind of high noon between himself and everything that was Jerusalem.

We will relive the drama of the opposition, the cosmic confrontation between Jesus and the powers of darkness for the rest of the week.

We know how the drama plays out by Friday afternoon.

But before we jump too hastily to the ending, let's consider what the powers **could** have done with this Jesus on Palm Sunday.

The powers **could** have assimilated him.

They **could** have said, "Isn't that Jesus wonderful? He is the greatest. Awesome! Our favorite son. And a wonderful, wonderful teacher."

And then the powers could have taken his living parables which grow like yeast in the ear and heart, and turned them into dead moralisms. Into sterile rules.

For example, they could make people believe that the point of the Good Samaritan is that everybody should love everybody.

Instead of allowing the parable to work in us to expose and shame our fear of wounds, and wounded in ourselves, among ourselves.

The powers could have assimilated the life of Jesus in to nothing but moralisms – feeble “do's and do not's.”

Or, they could have made people believe that the only meaning of Jesus was as an ethical teacher -- was that he taught the "Golden Rule." "Do unto others, etc."

But **they didn't** assimilate him. The powers probably knew that **we** would do their work for them, that the very church of Jesus Christ would turn his living word into sterile moralism, rules for living, ethical standards applicable to all, no matter what you believe. And we have, haven't we?

When Jesus rode into the city, the powers **could have** revered him absolutely.

They could have made him the "Totally Divine Jesus."

So divine, no one could reach him, approach him.

If the powers had made him super divine, then everyone would be off the hook.

Shop owners, money lenders, traders would believe that Jesus would never worry nor understand the gray world of commerce.

Jesus is only for personal salvation and has no workings in the rough and tumble world of business.

Legal minds, political souls would believe that Jesus just would not have the stomach for the wheeling and dealing of politics.

They could have revered Jesus out of this world – let the daily striving of business and politics go on as usual.

That's what the powers could have done with this Jesus. But they didn't.

The powers didn't bother; they probably knew we would do that – and we have. The very church of Jesus Christ has built walls and towers and shrines to keep Jesus in. To keep Jesus out of the world in which we live. To keep Jesus out of our business and politics. To keep him safely in the church, right where the principalities and powers want him. And they did not have to do a thing. We did it for them.

We know what happened.

Jesus was not assimilated by Jerusalem.

Jesus was not revered out of existence.

That was left for us.

In Jerusalem, Jesus was crucified.

The principalities and powers feared Jesus so much, they took a more direct approach to destroy him.

But even the cross could not do that!

It took us to do that. It took us to push Jesus aside. To compartmentalize him. To say religion has nothing to do with business and politics. Our religion hardly even has anything to do with God.

Our religion has become something the principalities and powers no longer fear, as they feared Jesus in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

How our church of Jesus has become a cozy and contained, manageable, entertaining, meet my needs and leave faith at the door kind of church

And there is something awful; deeply true about this way **we have assimilated the Christ.**

When we see how much the powers of Jerusalem feared Jesus on Palm Sunday, we see how far we have wandered from faith in that Jesus, that Palm Sunday Jesus; how easily we have compromised; how little we have settled for.

Oh, my people -- we do not gather here to praise some great teacher.

Or revere some totally divine figure.

We are here to enter into the life and death of Jesus, God's Christ.

It is a life and death drama.

Against powers seen and unseen.

When we leave here, today, what will we do with this Jesus?

If we allow him, the Christ that lives within us will go with us into our world out there.

Our Palm Sunday Hosannas will alert the powers out there too.

What will happen to that Christ among us in the world this week?

Will the Christ be assimilated?

Or divorced from our lives.

Or crucified?

We don't know.

We do know this.

"When he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this?'"

We know who this is.

This is Jesus the Christ, our Lord and Savior!

And to that we can only say:

Hosanna!