

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

4/17/2011

When the Cheering Stopped Mathew 21: 1-11

On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a donkey. The crowd went wild, waved palm branches and shouted, "Hosanna in the highest."

In Jesus' time, Israel was under the reign of the Roman Empire. In order to have control over the Jewish people, Rome concocted an ingenious scheme. It gave the high priest and other Jewish religious leaders the power to maintain domestic order on behalf of Rome.

In other words, Rome controlled the Jews through their own religious leaders. For the benefit of Rome, the Pharisees and the scribes justified oppression and injustice by saying, "This is the way it is. This is the will of God."

Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a donkey. That was a strange scene. Why not a horse? It was because a horse symbolized the empire of Rome and the Jewish religious authorities.

By riding a donkey, Jesus declared that neither Rome nor the Temple represented the will of God. Jesus presented himself as an instrument of God's decisive act on earth. He was the prince of peace.

On Palm Sunday, the crowd welcomed Jesus and his message. They shouted, "Hosanna to the highest."

Here it is essential for us to understand that the crowd represents you and me.

Why so? Let us recall our baptism. Don't you remember your brave confession before God and your brothers and sisters in Christ, "I accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior"?

Here the crowd and you and I overlap. Like the crowd, we cheered Jesus. We waved at him. We shouted, "Hosanna in the highest."

Then what happened after the cheering had stopped?

On Friday, the same crowd shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" The crowd cheered Jesus on Sunday. They crucified Jesus on Friday.

Here again, the crowd and you and I overlap. Why?

When we ignore that Jesus died even for a person we dislike or despise and call that person "the Devil," we crucify Jesus.

When we turn deaf ears to Paul's call for repentance and pretend to be indifferent to his passionate call for repentance, we crucify Jesus.

When division and the difference of opinion somehow make us forget that we are in one spirit with Christ, we crucify the Prince of Peace.

You and I are that crowd who greeted Jesus with palm branches on Sunday and crucified him on Friday.

In this context, let us be reminded: we are in the season of Lent, the season set aside for deep self-examination and contrite repentance. We are to pray, "Lord, I crucify you daily. Forgive me."

But the Christian Gospel does not end here. It proclaims that God forgives the unforgivable, even you and me. Jesus forgave the crowd then. He forgives us now.

That is why we can stand up and walk again. We can begin anew. This is the faith that braces us for the living of these days.

Thank you to God