

## **“A Parade of Palms and Passions”**

**Matthew 21:1-11**

**Palm/Passion Sunday: March 28, 2010**

**A sermon preached by Dr. Ivan H.M. Peden  
MUMC, Thomasville, NC**

**Copyright: 2010, Ivan Peden**

---

“A Parade of Palms and Passions.” In preparation for today’s homily, I came to this conclusion: It will take more than a parade of palms and passions – even with Jesus at the center of the parade – to usher in a new age of liberty, peace, and justice for all people. Enthusiasm and passion may be important ingredients, but they will not bring the kingdom of God.

Why do I draw this conclusion? Because enthusiasm is usually short-lived. Passions are tainted with mixed, if not, with inferior, impure motives. The question to ask today is: If palms and passions are not enough, what will it take to establish God’s kingdom of justice, peace, and freedom for all people?

There can be no doubt that when Jesus entered Jerusalem there was a great burst of enthusiasm – a spontaneous and contagious response that became a strikingly colorful procession of all kinds of people. Matthew records that the whole city was stirred when Jesus arrived riding on a donkey. The city was “stirred” . . . the word Matthew uses here is *seismos* in Greek, which means “quaking, trembling” . . . from which we derive our word “seismograph” – an instrument or scale for measuring earthquakes. What was happening was that Jerusalem, which had swelled to nearly 3 million people who had traveled to attend the Feast of Tabernacles, was now exploding with excitement. There was an emotional, enthusiastic earthquake in Jerusalem. There was frenzied excitement. Many in the crowd threw down coats on the road, while others cut branches of trees to wave at Jesus.

Victory was in the air. Many hoped that Jesus would bring the kind of victory and restoration that would rid them of Roman oppression. The streets erupted with singing and shouting: “Hosanna! (Save us now, we pray!), Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

It all happened very quickly. It was soon over. That’s how it is with a parade. You wait and wait until it passes near you . . . you get caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment . . . and then it is all over. It is quiet again. Everything seems just the way it was before the parade. You find the nearest trash bin and toss your palm branch away. It was momentary . . . it was

spontaneous ...it was random ...it was good while it lasted, but it all happened very quickly and it was forgotten almost as quickly. I guess that is the danger with most types of enthusiasm. It is short lived ...it is temporary ...it comes and goes. Palms are cut down from trees and waved ... then they've done their duty. Tragically, the same hands that held the palms as signs of victory were soon clenched as fists supporting the cry, "Away with him! Crucify him!"

In any crowd or group of people there are many passions. Underlying passions there are motives, as I mentioned earlier. In the crowd surrounding Jesus as he entered Jerusalem there must have been an assortment of motives ... a variety of passions ... as they welcomed him.

Surely there were those with a passion for profit: local inn keepers, food vendors, and those Jesus removed from their business stations in the temple precincts. Then there were those with a passion for signs and wonders. They had followed Jesus closely and were mesmerized by the spectacular things he had done: he had miraculously fed 5,000 people, healed lepers, restored sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, forgiven sins, and raised Lazarus and others from the dead. If the first group had a money motive, this group had a miracle motive . . . they wanted their curiosity for the miraculous to be fed some more.

A third group were those who were looking for a political victory ... those with a passion for power. Perhaps even some of Jesus' disciples were identified with this group. As they shouted "Hosanna!" they meant: "Save us now! The Roman yoke is heavy. Save us from it, Jesus! Bring in a new political dispensation. Be our leader, one of us!" This was a passion that was fueled by a political motive.

Unless the passions of these groups were immediately satisfied, there would be disappointment and even disillusionment with Jesus. Those who didn't make a lot of money ... those for whom Jesus did not perform more miracles ... those who soon realized that Jesus was not the leader of a military *coup* ... would soon fall away. The enthusiasm and passion of this crowd would be short lived. Once the parade was over and feelings settled down, events would take a very different turn . . . And we know how that drama unfolded

We must return to the question with which we began. If palms and passions will not do it, what will it take to establish God's kingdom in our midst? Clearly, it will take more than enthusiasm and passion. Don't misunderstand me: enthusiasm and passion are not negative qualities, indeed – when characterized by a more intentional, more abiding, more enduring

ingredient – they do much good. And what is that ingredient? What will it take to establish God’s kingdom in our midst?

The answer is to be found in the events that we recall in the unfolding drama of this coming week ...events that culminate in Jesus’ death on a cross outside Jerusalem on Friday afternoon and the astounding discovery of the empty tomb on Sunday morning. The answer to our question, “What will it take to establish God’s kingdom?” is to be found in our response to the person of Jesus Christ. If we approach Jesus with mere enthusiasm and with a passion driven by motives of personal gain, personal curiosity, or political gain, our allegiance to Jesus will be short lived. If, however, we approach Jesus with the intention of knowing who Jesus is – and making this inquiry an abiding, life-long, enduring inquiry – we will find the most rewarding blessing this life can offer. You see, the kingdom of God has already been established in our midst. Who Jesus is and what Jesus accomplished in his ministry, and through his death and resurrection, was God’s way of inaugurating God’s kingdom.

All that remains is for you and for me to respond in faith to Jesus, the servant Lord, the reigning Christ, whose life was marked by humility and obedience to the will of God. When we combine the waving of palms and the displaying of passions with our intentional, enduring commitment to Jesus as God’s humble servant ...to Jesus as Lord of our lives and Lord of all life ...then the parade continues ...then the enthusiasm and passion are not short lived because they accompany a much deeper commitment to, and vision of, God’s kingdom in our midst. May our commitment to Christ deepen this coming week.

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