

Who loves a parade?

Palm Sunday

April 5, 2009

Who loves a parade? Some would say that parades are going the way of the dodo bird...that they are becoming passé. Some would say that parades don't fit into the post modern, fast moving, techno world we live in. That they are too slow moving, too repetitive, too predictable, even too historic, to be appreciated by modern society.

But they continue to be very popular. People still sit out for hours to get a seat at the Macy's Thanksgiving day parade in New York. The Chicago St. Patrick's day parade is huge, as is the one in Charleston South Carolina. And the Rose Parade shows no signs of diminishing in the crowds or in the television viewership around the world, even expanding onto the internet. Just a few years ago our daughter Katye and some of her friends went down and stayed out most of the night to save places in front of a friends home to watch the Rose parade. So the crowds join it. It's fun! They do it so they can be part of it!

To belong to the crowd, to join in the applause and shouts of joy, the fun of the floats and to be part of something much larger of than themselves...a community united together. What a wonder and a joy, especially on the face of the children. Swept up in the joy of the moment.

It is the reason people love to go the sports events rather than stay home and watch them on TV. The truth is you can see things better on TV. The instant replay and the close-ups make the view much better on your big screen than in the stadium, especially if you are high up. Although most have big screens now, it is not the same as being home in the comfort. But the crowd is not the same either. I remember one of the few sharks games I have attended. We got free tickets from our

insurance adjuster or lawyer or somebody and Susan and I went with Ron and Val Hunt. This was years and years ago when we were all young enough to still go out at night. Ron and Val still are of course, but I am not...

Any way, Ron and I were not really watching the game but were chatting away when suddenly we were both on our feet shouting and cheering! I leaned in to Ron and shouted above the crowd..."What Happened, did we score?" "Yea, I think so" said Ron.... But there we were, on our feet, clapping and cheering and we did not even know what happened, swept up in the crowd. It was great fun.

People join the parade to belong to something, to be swept up in joy, to be part of a community!

To be part of something more than yourself...to connect to your history... Many of our parades have this as their starting place in history. Whether it is the drive for the Stanley cup or the drive for the super bowl or it is celebrating our history as a people, people come to remember who we are and what we have done together. We join together remembering who we are, what we come from, what we come through together. Together we have endured hardship and survived the harsh winters and difficulties...God has brought us through...and we give thanks. Or we celebrate our heritage, coming to America as immigrants, seeking relief from famine and finding harsh welcome but opportunity and through hard work and earnest effort we have made a place for ourselves among the many peoples that make up America...a story that could be the Vietnamese or the Irish or the Mexican...each celebrating their heritage with parades locally. We join the parade remember where we have come from and knowing that we are part of something greater than ourselves.

So today we remember another parade. Which began with the often wisest among us, the simplest among us, the children. Who welcomed

their special friend Jesus. They waved their scarves and coats and shouted Hosanna, Praise Him, Praise Him, He is God's Highest. Out of the mouth of children came the highest praise, the truest song. And suddenly set free, as if the words of the children rang so true in their hearts that they were set loose from their fears of Rome and of the oppressive religious leaders and legalistic rules that weighed them down. They suddenly had the weight lifted off their shoulders and they were light as feathers and they danced joyfully as if at a wedding reception and they had had an extra glass of wine...just one too many... They joined in the parade of the children laughing and skipping, skipping and they too welcomed their friend Jesus into the City for Passover!

Hosanna! Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord! He had set them free! He had healed the sick, he had listened to them! He had cared about them, them...ordinary, everyday people, and worse...sinners, people who had done things that they knew were wrong...for whatever reasons...and he had not condemned them, but cared for them, and forgiven them and loved them anyway. He had healed them from the inside out. And today they danced and sang his praised freely! It was a parade!

They knew that they belonged to this new community of Jesus, that all were welcome there and that they, the lost, the alone, the lonely, the sinner, the downcast, the ordinary, everyday, anyone was welcome. You did not have to be a Holy Person, a Pharisee or priest... Come along, put down your pain, sorrow, your hostility, your anger, your loss...and experience joy, freedom and grace abundant and amazing. Join the parade...Hosanna, Hosanna, sanna, sanna, Ho, Hosanna, Hosanna....

They were swept away by Joy. Like the flood waters of a great spring thaw, the love of Christ and all his teaching and his many miracles and

all his many, many acts of compassion had caused so many to be caught up in Him and now to be swept up in the joy of his coming at this time of Passover. The time to remember God's great acts of deliverance of his people...delivering them from slavery and bringing them salvation and bringing them into the promised land. No one who knew Jesus and saw what he was doing could approach Passover without reflecting on who Jesus seemed to be God's new savior, how God was using Jesus to bring about a new plan of salvation for all humanity, not just the Jews...and how God would incorporate the images of the old Passover into the new acts of salvation! Those followers who were Jewish were excited to see this Passover come, for they felt that a climax was coming in Jesus' ministry...and Jesus said as much and warned of the coming cross...

But they felt that God was going to do a new thing in Jesus and how could you not look at what Jesus was doing...healing the sick, teaching, preaching, setting the prisoners free, even raising the dead, and what God had done historically and what he promised to do...and not be filled with joyful expectation?

But the Pharisees were already out for a Buz-kill. They were always out to stop Jesus' followers, especially when there seemed to be any display of any unbridled enthusiasm or joy. They tried to get Jesus to stop the parade mid route. You must imagine the picture here, because it is both sweet and comical.

Jesus is riding on a donkey, which was a prophecy foretold by the prophet Micah. That the messiah would not enter Jerusalem on a stallion of war or riding in a chariot (a wagon of war, the ancient equivalent of a tank or armored personnel carrier), but upon a donkey...gently, non-threaten). Have you seen a grown man ride a donkey or burro? They don't fit well, do they? They sort of hang over all over the edges. Their feet almost scrape the ground as they ride. The Children and Jesus would have laughed, it was part of the message...he

came with JOY...not as a conquering king, but as a gentle savior to save us, as a friend who cares.

So here is Jesus with hundreds of people around him, talking, yelling, waving palm branches. He is riding the donkey back and forth, zig-zagging through the crowd, laughing and teasing the people and the kids. And along come the Pharisees. They want a word with Jesus. A private word. Good luck. Come along Jesus says...walk with me... In this crowd? Sure...hurry up...

So in all their fancy robes with their special tassels which they would have had to pick up and sort of half jog, in their fancy sandals tip toeing through the palm branches trying to keep up they would follow after Jesus trying to whisper above the shouting and laughter of the crowd...getting him to stop everyone from having this much fun! Frivolity must STOP!

Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the LORD!

Blessed is the One who comes in the Name of the Lord. Jesus is the One.

You have to stop this Jesus, tell them to stop this! And not just stop it, they ask Jesus to Rebuke his Disciples...his followers. Yell at them. REBUKE them. Speak harshly to them, because they have gone too far. They have become too enthusiastic. They have too much joy. They have expressed too much emotion. They have too much fun. They need to be taken down a few pegs, Jesus...be angry at them, and yell at them!

Does Jesus Rebuke us? NO. Especially not for expressing the joy that he himself give us. He invites us to join the kingdom of God, which he describes as a wedding reception...he says he came that His Joy Might Be In Us, and That Our Joy Might Be Made Full...why then would he Rebuke us when we experience and express it?

Jesus response is classic and powerful...it has come too far he warns, and if these disciples are silent, the rocks themselves will cry out in praise! There comes a time when you can't keep from praise, when it is impossible to stop the crowd from cheering. This was one of those times, the parade had begun and there was no way to stop it...you could join in , or turn away...these were you options.

The parade is passing by...what will you do?