From Palm Sunday to Good Friday

Read Zechariah 9:9 and Matthew 21:1-11

Key verse: “The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’” (Matthew 21:9)

From celebration to disaster.

Some years ago, I went into the hospital for what should have been a rather routine procedure. I remember waking up in a recovery room, surrounded by the happy, smiling faces of my family. “Everything went fine!”

Since I had not eaten since the day before, a nurse brought me a sandwich, and I took a few bites. Then, all of a sudden, “things went south.” I was rushed back into the surgery suite. Emergency procedures were done. Something had gone terribly wrong, and our celebration had shifted to a scene of grave concern. Things had gone from jubilation to despair, in such a short time.

Sometimes things can start out so well, and then go so terribly wrong. In less than a week, Jesus’ life went from the jubilation of Palm Sunday to the anguish of Good Friday. The crowds that cheered Him on Palm Sunday would jeer Him on Good Friday. “Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord” would change to “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Things would go from jubilation to despair, in such a short time.

The crowds that cheered Him on Palm Sunday thought they were getting a political-military savior to deliver them from Rome. Instead, they got a warrior for peace and a suffering messiah. That wasn’t at all what they expected or wanted.

The clues, however, were there on Palm Sunday. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, He was fulfilling the messianic prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. “Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, Say to the Daughter Zion, ‘Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey....’” (Matthew 21:4).
The Messiah? Yes. A king? Yes. But Jesus had not come to lead an armed insurrection against the Romans. Instead, He had come “humble and riding on a donkey.” He had come to lead a non-violent revolution of the heart.

So, the cheers of Palm Sunday became the jeers of Good Friday. Jesus’ week tumbled from celebration to disaster.

Yet, we call that terrible day at Golgotha, “Good Friday.” Why?

Though the people wanted a political-military savior, Jesus understood that the real enemy was not the Roman occupiers. The real enemy occupies every human heart, and that enemy is called sin.

Humanity’s greatest problem is a problem of the heart. And Jesus died on the cross so that the hearts of human beings could be cleansed and restored to a right relationship with God. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

From celebration to seeming disaster in less than a week. But the tragedy of the cross was the salvation of the world! So, it was a good Friday after all.

Thanks be to God!

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