Palm Sunday, April 11, 1976
KING FOR A DAY!
I Luke 19:28-42

Some years ago, a popular radio program which later became a television program was called "Queen for a Day." On that program as I remember it, three or four women were chosen from the studio audience and then each one was interviewed by the master of ceremonies and told what she hoped for if she was selected Queen for a Day.

The stories were usually filled with emotion and often the contestants were seeking something for someone else. A mother might tell of the need of an operation for one of her children. Someone else would tell of wanting to make a trip to see a close relative that she had not seen for many years. The stories were varied and no doubt the things wanted were justified. After all the stories had been heard, the audience would vote by applause and choose one of the women as "Queen for a Day." The winner would then receive what she had asked for and many more things she had not asked for. She was Queen for a day. I've often wondered what happened to those persons a few days or weeks or even months later.

On Palm Sunday almost 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ was made King for a day. He was chosen by the crowd as he was entering Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover. We know what happened to him a few days later.

This being made King for a day was different from other coronations. There was no crown put on his head, although later in the week he received a crown of thorns. He did not receive any prizes. The event took place on the spur of the moment. It was more like a demonstration than a coronation. And undoubtedly some joined in the demonstration just because it was taking place. Almost any crowd always attracts a larger crowd.

The road to Jerusalem was often used for demonstrations and processions. The people of that city were connoisseurs in triumphal parades. Many years ago, there had been King Solomon's inaugural, followed by the colorful visit of the Queen of Sheba. There were processions which featured the return of Jewish Military heroes from successful wars and each year there were the usual processions of people coming to the city for the celebration of the high religious festivals. No doubt there were some still living who could remember how Herod the Great had come riding into the city at the head of any army to defy the haughty Sanhedrin that had summoned him to trial.

But today another kind of King was entering the holy city. There was no tramp of feet marching in measured cadence, no disciplined ranks, no glittering helmets or flags, no rows of Roman soldiers and no colorful war horses or battle chariots; no martial music, no mounted trumpeters to herald his coming. It was a royal entry of a different nature.

1. Note first that those who were hailing Jesus as king for the most part completely misunderstood his kingship. They had remade him into the image of the kind of king they wanted him to be.

Enthusiasm is contagious and within a short time religious fervor and patriotic zeal took hold of the crowd. Many of those present expected that this was the beginning of a revolutionary movement that would throw the Romans out of Palestine and re-establish the throne of King David. Israel would become a mighty worldly empire again.

So, there must've been some things about this being made King for a day that were distasteful to Jesus. Ordinarily he avoided the spectacular. His miracles drew crowds, but they were a constant source of embarrassment to him. He didn't want people to follow him because they thought of him as a miracle worker. So, he often told those whom he had healed to keep it a secret. Once Jesus had an unfortunate experience with a crowd when he fed the five thousand and found they were more interested in his power to provide bread than in his message. Jesus knew how fickle crowds could be. He also knew the temptation of having a crowd follow him. He realized how easily he could meet the popular demand and swing the multitude to his banner if he wished.

So, on Palm Sunday, Jesus cherished no illusions about either the source or the extent of the crowd's enthusiasm. He knew that for the most part it was misguided and would be short-lived.

Jesus also knows that sometimes our religious fervor is off the track a little. We too remake him into the kind of Messiah we want or think we need, and in so doing we limit him to that role as far as we are concerned. We like to blot out the parts of his life and message that make us uncomfortable or that judge our way of life.

But being misunderstood and misinterpreted is nothing new to Jesus Christ. Even those nearest to him misunderstood him and he spent much of his time trying to make his message clear.

When Jesus spoke of victory, they thought of victory in battle; but he was speaking of triumphant living. When he spoke of liberty, many thought only of political liberty, escape from the yoke of Rome. Jesus went beyond that-- "You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free."

When Jesus spoke of strength and power, people thought primarily of armed forces and physical might, but he was thinking of the strength that comes from within. When Jesus spoke of treasures, people thought of possessions. He was speaking of the riches of the spiritual life. When Jesus spoke of a more abundant 1ife, people though only of a change of circumstances, but he was speaking of a new vitality of the spirit.

Always people narrow his message and try to squeeze it into the pigeonholes of our minds. Yet Jesus understands our misunderstanding. In another day, Jesus might have rebuked the crowds, but not today. He had faced and accepted crowds before. There was no more danger in the Palm Sunday crowd's acclaim. They had made him King for a day, but he knew that it was a far different kind of king-ship than they expected.

2. And this is our second point that the Palm Sunday story illustrates. The crowd which hailed Jesus knew and said the right words, but they didn't know really what those words meant.

Like the Palm Sunday crowd, that's often also our problem. We know and say the right words, but we are not always aware of what those words mean and imply.

It's easy to say to someone — "I love you!" But when the going gets tough and we have to experience the true meaning of the word love, then it's a different matter. It's easy to say, "I love God," and then forget that the Bible warns us that if we say we love God and hate another human being we are liars.

When we get married, we say the right words in the marriage ceremony, “I take you to be my wife and I promise to love and sustain you in the bonds of marriage from this day forward, in joy and in sorrow, in plenty and in want, in sickness and in health, till death shall part us, according to God’s holy ordinance.”

But to know the meaning of these words, to live them — that can be a different matter. Now of course often the first time we say the right words, we cannot possibly know the meaning and implications because we do not know what the future will bring. The first time we say, “I love you,” we cannot possibly know some of the future demands that that love will make of us.

The crowd on Palm Sunday said the right words, “Jesus Christ is King,” but they did not at that point understand the nature of his kingship or the extent of his kingdom. They said the right words but did not know the meaning.

3. And this brings us to the third point about Palm Sunday. And it’s the good news! Jesus Christ accepted the words of the people, he accepted their love and devotion, even though he knew they did not understand his kingship or the words they were saying. He graciously accepted their enthusiastic acclaim without a sign of cynicism. It was as though he wanted to give the people one fine high moment to which they could later look back.

More importantly, Jesus Christ was the kind of person who could accept a person’s love and devotion even though he knew that person might be misunderstanding his ministry. In the same way God accepts our love and praise even though sometimes mistakenly given or misunderstood. God knows that none of our motives are ever completely pure. Jesus knew that! He also knew that we have to start somewhere, and we may start with a very immature faith so that when we say, “Jesus is Lord,” we are not sure of what we are really saying. God accepts us no matter how stumbling our faith may be.

Jesus also knew on that Palm Sunday that much of the love and devotion he was experiencing would not last long. A few days later many of the same people would be turning against him, or at least not standing by him. But Jesus accepted the enthusiasm and acclaim anyway. It was valid for the moment.

So, the Palm Sunday story of King for a day, says, beware of quenching another person’s enthusiasm, love, devotion, or happiness. Even though we may be certain that it will not last very long, let it be. Too often, we, like the Pharisees in this story want to tell people to be quiet, to stop rejoicing. Or we throw cold water on their happi-ness by telling them it can’t last. We try to spoil the beautiful moment.

Often, we say to children who are naturally happy and extraordinarily open, “Just wait, someday you’ll find that life is full of sadness and tragedy!” And so, it is. But why let that spoil the moment of our happiness and beauty now.

Or we say to a couple who have just been married and are still in a state of sublime bliss and joy, “Just way, one day you’11 see that there is al.so much unhappiness in marriage.” That may be true, but what’s that got to do with their happiness here and now.

A young person comes home from high school with good grades on his or her report card, full of enthusiasm and joy and an older person who considers himself wise says, “So what, just wait until you get to college, and you’ll find that it’s not so easy to make those kinds of grades.”

The state of enthusiasm is not that it should be suppressed or quenched because we do not know for sure the meaning of the words or the extent of our joy. Enthusiasm, love, and devotion are not to be quenched, but rather directed and deepened.

That's why Jesus Christ does not repudiate our enthusiasm or devotion. He wants to lead it on to a deepening so that it becomes true loyalty, the kind of loyalty that will stay with us as we follow Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane, to the cross itself and to the resurrection.

Then we will know that he is not just King for a day. He is King forever, and his kingdom is everywhere and eternal. Jesus is Lord and King. Say those words and then follow him and you will come to know their meaning in their fullness. Ride on, Ride on in Majesty! Amen.