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Palm Sunday

Today is the last Sunday before Easter, a Sunday we often refer to as Palm Sunday.

The name comes from the entry our Lord made into Jerusalem a few days before Passover. This special occasion is recorded in each of the four gospels but to begin today we are turning to John's account beginning at John Chapter twelve verse twelve (NLT).

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The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted,

“Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD! Hail to the King of Israel!”

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Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said: “Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey’s colt.”

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His disciples didn't understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him.

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Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and they were telling others about it. That was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign. Then the Pharisees said to each other, “There’s nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him!”

Pray.

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Jesus and the disciples had just spent the previous day at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

This portion of scripture finds them heading toward Jerusalem to prepare for the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread that we spoke about last Sunday

It is believed that Jerusalem at that time was home to about 20,000 regular residents. But the celebration of the feast called for attendance at Jerusalem, at the temple.

So, families from all over the land would travel to Jerusalem swelling the population to three or four times its normal size.

People would come early. They needed time to find a place to stay, they needed time to find the lamb with out blemish. They needed time to make all the preparations for the feast. And they needed lots of time to meet with friends and relatives whom they had not seen for some time.

It was a joyous time, a time of celebration and a time to once again encourage one another, to remind themselves of the hopeful prophecies of the Old Testament. Prophecies that predicted the eventual arrival of a new King for them.

And there is no doubt that they were anxiously awaiting that King. The King that would throw off the Roman occupation and set them free.

These folks were anticipating a coronation.

Do you remember the coronation of Queen Elizabeth?

I do. I remember that it was big news. It was a time before TV but radios were covering the event and the Newspapers were covered with picture after picture from every aspect of the event.

People were excited and enthused. And I believe a similar attitude would have prevailed as Jesus approached Jerusalem.

John records that a large number of Passover visitors went out to meet him. They were ready not just to greet him but to crown him as King.

The news of Lazarus being raised from the dead had spread quickly. After all, who had ever heard of someone being restored to life after being dead for a couple of days!

And then of course there would be those who would be very familiar with the Old Testament prophecies about the coming King.

Part of the celebration with friends and family during Passover week would be the encouraging of each other by reminding themselves of the many prophetic promises and this particular prophecy may well have been one of them.

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It is likely that they knew very well the words from Zechariah Chapter nine (NLT) where beginning at verse nine we read:

Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey's colt.

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I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy all the weapons used in battle, and your king will bring peace to the nations. His realm will stretch from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

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So you can imagine the excitement in their hearts when they ran out to see the miracle worker Jesus riding on a donkey! This must be the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy! This must be the promised King.

You can imagine how when they read these words predicting the removal of warhorses and weapons they would have instantly concluded that these referred to the weapons of the Romans.

But for many of those who went out to celebrate a coronation, within a few days their excitement and enthusiasm would quickly change to disappointment, to disenchantment, and bitterness.

By the time Jesus would hang on a cross, there were precious few who remained to claim him as their King or deliverer.

So, some questions for today.

First, Where did all these people go? These people who were excited about Jesus?

Secondly, Are the people of today really different than those of that time?

So many went out to see Jesus. They had heard of the miracles. Some probably had witnessed the miracles.

But the entire population did not turn out. The majority remained in the city quite likely largely skeptical of the stories and rumors circulating about miracles.

We now live in a time when many are growing up with little teaching from a church or Sunday school.

But almost all have heard at least a little bit about the one called Jesus who was supposed to be a miracle worker.

But they remain totally skeptical. Perhaps they says things like: ‘Show me personally a miracle and then I will believe. ‘

Unfortunately, their skepticism keeps them from finding out more about Jesus, finding out that his main purpose was not to work miracles to alleviate their physical conditions but to work a spiritual miracle.

While the death and resurrection of Jesus would have made some news in Jerusalem there would have been many who would have written off those events as simply the death of another trouble maker and the supposed resurrection as some sort of slight of hand pulled off by his followers.

Their unwillingness to investigate, their unwillingness to search for truth, left them plodding along life’s journey toward an eventual death and eternity in hell.

Unfortunately, the same fate awaits those in our society who know about Jesus but are unwilling to search for that same truth.

They live in the kingdom of darkness in desperate need of light.

And we as individuals and collectively as a church need to remind ourselves that we have been charged with an awesome responsibility, that of bringing light to an ever increasing dark kingdom.

Our calling is first to be disciples, dedicated followers of Jesus and then to make disciples, that is to share our knowledge of him and his willingness to save them from a dreadful eternity.

We cannot simply be a church for believers we must always be the beacon of light that is clearly our calling.

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In Romans ten verses thirteen to fifteen (NLT) Paul lays out this challenge for us.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good thing!

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Now when you read that word preacher, perhaps you think in terms of a minister, pastor or evangelist and thus begin to think well this preaching Paul mentions is not my job.

But one of the nuances of the Greek word translated as ‘preach’ is simply: “to publish, or openly proclaim something which has been done.

All of us can share what the Lord has done for us and his willingness to save all who will seek him.

So, this leaves us as individuals and as a church with the critical task of making sure everyone does know about Jesus and the implications of not pursuing the truth about him.

Next, I suspect that there were people in the group who went out to crown him King who became disappointed, disenchanted and bitter.

Jesus certainly appeared to be the one in the prophecy! He ticked all the boxes! He had to be the one!

The miracles, they had to be proof that he was indeed the messiah, their long awaited anointed one, their delivering King.

Perhaps their disappointment began when the religious authorities arrested Jesus and put him on trial.

These were supposed to be the wise men of the faith. The people who were to be trusted when it came to the things of God.

They had studied for endless hours. They knew the scriptures inside out.

And logically then if they said Jesus was some sort of charlatan or some sort of fraud then surely these religious leaders must be right.

And then to see Jesus hanging in complete humiliation on a criminal's cross, how could this be a king? How could this be our saviour, our deliverer. How could this possibly be the king predicted by Zechariah?

And so, as the events of the trial and crucifixion passed' many probably went back to their lives, disappointed, disenchanted and bitter.

While many of them might have become valuable assets to carrying the truth about why Jesus died and the truth about his resurrection to those around, the enemy effectively used their disappointment, disenchantment, and bitterness to neutralize their potential for kingdom builders.

` Do you know that the world seems to have more than its share of disappointed, disenchanted, and bitter people?

People disappointed over the way they have been treated by an employer.

Bitter because of the way they have been treated by an ex-spouse.

Disenchanted with their government and its failure to keep up to election promises. The list goes on and on.

And unfortunately, their bitterness impacts their lives going forward, always carrying a chip on their shoulder never quite able to let it go and get on with life.

And now with over twenty years in ministry, I am convinced more than ever the world around us contains many, many, people who once considered themselves to be active and committed believers but are now disenchanted and bitter.

People who have been effectively neutralized from productive work in the Kingdom and whose eternal destiny may be of considerable concern.

I think that it is one of our enemy's key tools.

I am guessing but I suspect you know some within your circle of friends, neighbours and loved ones.

Perhaps they came and checked out Jesus because they had a serious need. There was something they were desperate about, and they realized that the solution they sought was beyond their own power.

So, they brought their need to Jesus. They prayed hard. They asked fellow believers to pray hard. But when the solution that they had envisaged did not come to pass they became disappointed.

They became disenchanted with a God who failed to see things their way and respond to their wishes in the manner and in the timeframe they deemed appropriate.

I know of other cases where someone has sought God over a broken relationship.

They were sure that God could intervene in their broken marriage relationship, would set aside his decision to give people freedom of choice and simply force the wayward partner to return.

And when the result they sought did not materialize their attitude became one of ‘if God didn’t fix my hurt then why should I serve him?’

And then there are many people disenchanted people who once were enthusiastic believers. They may even have loved to be active and serving but then some thing or somebody happened.

They found themselves being hurt by an individual or even the church board or a pastor. And as a result, they become disillusioned, and disappointed with the church and with God.

They are not interested in serving any longer, and many stop attending church entirely and perhaps not even associating with other believers.

The gifting they were given as God’s children lies dormant. The enemy has neutralized another victim.

There is no getting around the fact that if your gifting is not being used and you are not living out God's purposes for your life then the enemy has won.

The good news is that while the disciples who were closest to Jesus were disappointed, and perhaps even for a time disenchanted and bitter, they refused to stay in that mode.

They refused to let the enemy have his way. They looked beyond the momentary bitterness and disenchantment and became determined to follow the Lord.

And their determination to move beyond the disenchantment changed their world.

To answer our opening question of "where did all the people go" we don't have all the answers, I've just focussed on two.

To summarize, there are many people who have yet to hear, yet to be encouraged to seek the Lord, and it is our job as individual believers and collectively as a church to encourage them to do so before it is eternally too late.

And secondly for those who may be disillusioned, disenchanted and bitter. If there happened to be one such person listening either live in our service here this morning or later on the web site I want to encourage you that it is time to move on.

People are people, we are all subject to failure and we all make mistakes and treat others poorly from time to time.

But Jesus is still the perfect sinless lamb of God he calls us to be his followers to be his faithful disciples through thick and thin.

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In John chapter six it seems that the followers of Jesus and there were many at that time were having a bad day. John writes in verse 36 (MSG)

After this a lot of his disciples left. They no longer wanted to be associated with him. Then Jesus gave the Twelve their chance: “Do you also want to leave?”

Peter replied, “Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We’ve already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God.”

Don't let our enemy use disenchantment and bitterness to neutralize you as a servant of the King. It is time to move on.

Its is time to allow the Lord to turn your bitterness into sweetness.

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