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Waving At Jesus

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

Mark 11:7-10 [Pew Bibles Page 879]

And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it. And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed cried out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!”

If a celebrity comes to town, I want to be there.

I was there, waving and hollering when Carol Jason drove by in the Channel Four Car during last summer’s Canal Fest Parade.

I was there when candidate Bill Clinton spoke at a rally at Canisius College five years ago. I was standing on a table at the back of the crowd, waving and looking when Clinton’s bus arrived up there on the top deck of the parking lot.

I was there in Stanley, Virginia for the Fourth of July Celebration when Virginia senate-hopeful John Warner marched in the parade. I was jumping out into the street, waving and blowing kisses as his then-wife, the always beautiful Elizabeth Taylor, drove by.

I was there so many years ago on the brick-paved streets of Athens, when vice-president Nixon’s campaign train chugged through on a whistle-stop tour. I was waving and yelling for Nixon to see me all dressed up in my junior high school band uniform.

I was there when Lyndon Johnson climbed out of the safety of his car and disappeared into a sea of college students and towns-folk on his

visit to my home town back in 1964. I was one of the thousands waving and shouting.

“Look at me! See me! I’m here!”

I was there. I was one of almost half-a-million people at the Inauguration. I was one of over 80 thousand at the championship game. I was there. I saw the action. I witnessed the event. I caught a glimpse of the famous person. I cheered. I waved.

I knew it was impossible. I knew I was just one in a multitude. But I waved. I hoped he would see me. I wished she would look my way. I wanted to catch his eye.

I am no different from those people who lined the streets of Jerusalem so many years ago. We all come out to see the show. We want to watch the action. We get all wrapped up in the excitement. And when he passes by, we cheer. We wave the flags the Exchange Club hands out or the palm branches the disciples distribute.

And there is always a secret wish in our hearts: that he will see us in the crowd, that he will know we are there, that he will pick us out for special recognition - a personal wink and a wave, a handshake, an autograph.

Just like the lyrics of the song from *Jesus Christ, Superstar* which the crowd sang that first Palm Sunday: “Christ you know I love you, did you see I waved?”

That’s what brings so many of us out to church on days like this. “Do you see me, Jesus? I’m here. Did you notice how much money I put in the offering plate? How do you like the new clothes I’m wearing? See how contrite I am? See how holy I am? Did you pay attention to my closed eyes and quiet concentration during the prayers? See what a good boy I am? See, I’m doing what you wanted.”

We want Jesus to take notice of us. We want him to see that we waved. We want him to know that we’re here, ready to enjoy the celebration. We’re ready to shout *hallelujah!* come Easter morning. We’re ready to accept all the promises of God. We’re ready to embrace new life.

“Hey, Jesus, pay attention to me; because today I’m paying attention to you!”

Palm Sunday is like when my friends used to gather together on a Saturday night. We’d all get together and proclaim: it’s party time! It’s

time to enjoy ourselves. It's time to set aside all the troubles and worries of life. So forget the unpaid bills and the bank balances for a little while. Set aside that term paper that's due on Monday. Don't even think about your college classes tonight. It's time for a party. And every one of us wants to be the life of the party.

When Jesus paraded into Jerusalem, it was a party atmosphere. There was a celebration going on. There was excitement in the air. The crowd was stirred up. The disciples were primed for action. Everyone knew this was the beginning of something great. And so, when Jesus rode by on his donkey, they all waved and shouted at him. They wanted Jesus to see them there. They wanted Jesus to know they supported him. They wanted to be part of the action.

Are you raring to go? Are you all stirred up? Are you primed for the party? Does the idea of Jesus parading into your life get you excited? Does the picture of Jesus walking down your street, heading for your home, looking for your face in the crowd - does that make you want to celebrate?

I hope you are. You should be. But maybe you're a little like me at some parties I've attended. I feel a little out of place. I don't seem to fit in. I can't quite have as good a time as I want. The celebration's going on, but I feel left out.

Many years ago, on a late fall weekend, I went interviewing for a job. Janet and I arrived on a Saturday afternoon in a little town in the western mountains of Virginia. It seemed like a ghost town. There was no one stirring about. We found the house belonging to our hosts, and walked up to the door. Beulah was the chairman of the pulpit committee and Sam was her husband. They told us that that very night, the local high school football team was playing for the state championship over in Roanoke, some 75 miles away.

You need to know that in rural America, professional football is not king, very few southerners back then ever watched hockey, the big college teams were ignored - but the local high school team, *that* was king. Narrows was a town that lived by its high school football team. When the team won, the town was a wonderful place to live. When the team lost, a shroud of depression draped the river valley.

Had I not been coming for a trial sermon the next morning, Sam and Beulah would have been in Roanoke at the game. Although they were in

their seventies and their children had all grown and moved away, they still knew almost every player on the team. The coach was a deacon in the church.

Well, after dinner, Janet and I encouraged Sam to turn on the television. You may not believe it, but that game was on T.V. The four of us sat in that living room and watched the game. The Narrows High School Green Wave won the small school state championship that night. And as the gun sounded, Beulah's phone started ringing.

She even had to telephone her son to tell him the news. He was a colonel, an attaché to the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait; but she called him. Before the night was over, people started dropping by the house. It was time to celebrate. It was time to party.

And I quickly realized, that while I did my best to be a gracious guest and pretended to be just as excited as they were about the game, I was an outsider. I really didn't belong at the victory party.

But Sam and Beulah - they knew the players and coaches personally. They had shared their lives together. They were all family and friends. They had suffered through earlier defeats. They remembered, back when their children were playing on the very same gridiron; they remembered the rigors of training, the sweat and sacrifices of long practices and of late, warmed-over dinners. They remembered watching game after game in rain and cold and sometimes snow. They remembered the agony of defeat - so they were able to celebrate wholly the ecstasy of victory in a way that I never could.

All through the night the party continued: the car horns would blow out, peoples' voices would carry through the night air sounds of laughter and cheers.

I was at the party, but I was an intruder. I was at the party but I hadn't spent years preparing for it. I was at the party, but none of me was invested in it. I was at the party, but I had no prior commitment. I wore the crown of a champion that night, but it didn't fit me!

On Palm Sunday the victory celebration started. No one in the cheering and waving crowd knew what a rough week laid ahead. No one who waved knew how Jesus was going to end up. No one who called out his name that day could have predicted that in just a few short days the crowd would be calling out for Barabbas instead. No one knew of the

suffering and the pain, of the shock and the disappointment that was waiting. No one suspected that Friday would be called Good and that Saturday would be black and that the next Sunday would bring a resurrection.

Although the party began, no one knew what was coming.
But I'm telling you,

- if you don't go through the week of passion with Jesus,
- if you don't understand his suffering and death,
- if you won't recognize your own sin and admit your need for

forgiveness,

- if you can't see your own fault in betrayal and denial - then you won't really be able to join in the victory celebration next week.

If you want to wear the crown of a victor, you've got to know the rigors of the Christian life. You've got to know Jesus as your personal savior and friend. You've got to know how to pray and listen for answers to your prayers. You've got to know how to accept and give forgiveness. You've got to practice hospitality and generosity. You've got to know how to walk down through those valleys of shadow and climb up on the other side into a glorious new day's dawning. You've got to be committed and invested in following Christ.

And then, then, you will enjoy the victory. You will celebrate in your heart. You will wave, and Jesus will notice.