

EXALTATION

Texts: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
Luke 19:28-38
LHUMC 3/24/13
(Palm Sunday)

I. Introduction

A. They say that everybody loves a parade.

1. Growing up, I didn't have much of a choice about whether I loved parades or not-- I grew up going to parades because my dad was a high school band director.
2. From the time we were born, my sister and brother and I were dragged to just about every little town in northern Illinois to parades.
 - a) Creston Booster Days parade
 - b) Harvard Milk Festival parade
 - c) And the highlight was the year my dad's band marched in the parade at the Air Show at Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

B. Over the years since, I've participated in more parades than I've attended.

1. As a member of marching bands
2. As a band director myself (e.g. the Bronson Halloween Parade)
3. Even as a pastor (the 4th of July parade in Constantine where every church had a float—where it was so traditional that we had a line in the church budget for “parade candy”—since it was the expectation that every wagon, every group would toss candy to the crowd. If you didn't you heard about it from them—that crowd could turn on you pretty fast.)

C. Yes, everyone loves a parade

1. It is a time of great rejoicing.
2. I still remember the cheers that have been aimed my way in all those times I've participated in parades.

D. And today on Palm Sunday, we remember one of the great parades in the Bible, that parade when Jesus entered Jerusalem.

1. And not only did those watching that parade cheer, they waved palms as well. And Mark's version says that they even laid their coats on the road in front that parade's grand marshal. (I don't remember that happening in any parades I've been in!)
2. And not only that, apparently they shouted out this great Psalm of rejoicing that they would have learned as kids, a Psalm that

centuries before would have been shouted in the Temple in Jerusalem whenever the King came to worship (whether it was David or someone else).

- E. As I've been remembering this parade scene again, and the lengths the people went in their praise and rejoicing, I've been looking for a stronger word.
1. "Praise" may not be enough.
 2. We "praise" someone when we say "nice job" or when we applaud politely.
 3. That crowd was going way beyond that.
 4. So I landed on the word "exalt" that the Psalmist finally uses (28)
 - a) To "exalt" someone takes praise to a whole new level.
 - b) When you "exalt" someone, you are putting your whole heart into it.
 - c) When you show your "exaltation", you might do things like wave a palm or put your coat in the road.
- F. And as I've been pondering Psalm 118 a little more—this great prayer not just of praise but truly of exaltation, I'm wondering how often our prayers to our king rise to that level. Anyone pray a "prayer of exaltation" to God this morning? In the past week? Ever?
- II. But here's the thing—when those people exalted Jesus that day as he rode into town on a donkey, given the events that were to happen in the week to come, , you have to wonder some at how heart –felt their exaltation really was. Because remember, these were some of the same folks that when Friday came, were not shouting "Hosanna" anymore, but instead "Crucify him." So the first thing we might learn from that crowd at that parade is what true exaltation isn't. Because there are some clues, and much of it has to do with what they shouted-- "Hosanna"! , which means "Save us!" Which remember was the same thing they had shouted in the time when Psalm 118 first came about at the current, human king as he came down the aisle of the Temple. Based simply on what they were shouting and how the story played out, there are some issues we might take with this particular crowd and their exaltation.
- A. Beginning with the question of who it was they were really looking for and hoping for in this one they were calling (at least for the moment) their king.
1. Here's the problem—when you shout something at someone that for hundreds of years you've shouted at whomever your earthly king was, don't you think that shows certain expectations?

2. Expectations about what kind of king you are hoping this person to be?
 3. And we can't really blame those folks for looking for and hoping for a King/Messiah in the form of someone like David, who had rescued them from enemies in the past with great military power.
 4. For the truth is, times were tough in Jerusalem—the Jewish people were ruled by Pilate and the other Roman authorities with an iron fist. And so they were looking for any hope they could find.
 5. So you can't really blame them for putting unrealistic expectations on Jesus, and shouting "Hosanna" at him with the hope that he might indeed turn out to be another David.
 6. Although I might argue that the first clue that he was going to be a very different kind of king that they apparently ignored was the whole donkey thing—what kind of military, political leader rides into town on a donkey?
 7. And so the bottom line in this argument is that as the week progressed, and it became abundantly clear that Jesus had no desire in being that kind of king, the people turned on him in their exaltation, and by the end of the week were shouting very different things.
- B. It also bothers me a little bit about shouting "Hosanna-Save us!" as a basis for your exaltation.
1. I understand why they did it—when you are oppressed, and someone comes to town that you've been hearing about, someone who had been setting people free from demons and healing people and feeding thousands with a few loaves and fishes, you might indeed be inclined to shout "save us"
 2. But as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that when your basis for exaltation has to do only with your expectations, that can be a problem.
 3. Or to put it a little differently, when you exalt someone with clear expectations of what you might get out of it in return, that can be a problem.
 4. Two thoughts—
 - a) In the secular world, I've heard it called the "Eddie Haskell" syndrome. Remember him?
 - 1) That kid who endlessly praised Mrs. Cleaver, but you always got the sense that it was a little hollow?
 - 2) That he was doing it simply because he was expecting something in return?

- 3) Was that the crowd's problem? Was that why their exaltation didn't last?
- b) And then I've heard the problem with this crowd and Jesus summed up by saying that Jesus was offering a long-term solution to a short-term problem
 - 1) In other words, to offer the gift of eternal salvation to a group of folks who wanted it right now, in their immediate situation, is what caused their exaltation to become a little hollow.
 - 2) They couldn't get beyond their present reality to see the big picture—to see the true glory of the ultimate and eternal salvation that Jesus was going to give them in a few days.
5. The real problem is summed up by these questions: What happens to your shouts (or your prayers) of exaltation if they are based on the hope for something that you are going to get in return? And then what happens when it doesn't happen, at least in the way you were expecting it to? You might call it "exaltation with an agenda".
6. Or to go back to the parade metaphor, , what happens when you are expecting him to throw you some candy and he doesn't? I remember in Constantine, if you were in the parade, you ran out of candy before the end of the parade at your own peril! It could get ugly if that happened!
7. Whatever it was, I would have felt a little better about that crowd if they had shouted something like "Thank you" instead of "Save us". If they'd shouted that, it might have been a clue that their exaltation wasn't a temporary reaction and wasn't about their own agenda.

III. All of which brings us to where the rubber hits the road—with the question of how can we pray with a spirit of exaltation? That's a starting point—for if you are like me, perhaps that is not a word you would use to describe your prayer life most of the time. And even beyond that, the story of the first Palm Sunday raises the deeper question of how can we pray prayers of exaltation and really mean it? How can we keep our spirit of exaltation when Jesus doesn't meet our immediate expectations? How can we continue to exalt him even in the rough times of life? A couple of things are key to it all, and as we come to the end of our Lenten journey praying our way through some of the Psalms, these are themes that we keep coming back to, no matter what kind of Psalm we're talking about, and no matter what kind of prayer we try to pray

- A. The first has to do with how well we know God.
1. We talked about this when we talked about praying prayers of trust—that it's hard to trust someone you don't know.
 2. We talked about it again when we talked about praying prayers of confession—it's hard to confess what you've done wrong to someone you don't know.
 3. And today, I would say that it's hard to exalt someone you don't really know.
 - a) That was the problem with the folks in Jerusalem—it was hard to sustain their level of exaltation when they realized that Jesus wasn't what they expected.
 - b) If they really knew him, they wouldn't have been surprised when he rejected their definition of what a king was supposed to be and went to the cross.
 - c) And their shouts of exaltation would have remained for him rather than becoming shouts against him.
 4. If the Psalms teach us nothing else, it is that we are to do all we can to try to get to know God better. Whether that's Bible studies or devotional times or simply praying more often or in new kinds of ways, or going to church more often, we all could probably stand to get to know God better.
 - a) Because when we do, it allows us to be honest in our prayers, no matter what kind of prayer it is.
 - b) And in today's case, the only real and lasting prayers of exaltation are prayers where we are honest enough to know that we are exalting God from our hearts, and not necessarily expecting anything in return.
- B. The other thing that so many of these Psalms have in common is that they remind us of the importance of remembering. I always find it particularly fascinating that so many of the Psalms begin in the past tense.
1. And in doing so, they are reminding us we would do well to remember what God has already done in our lives.
 2. If we remember all the good that God has done in our lives, it allows us to pray prayers of exaltation no matter what is presently going on for us.
 3. It allows us to exalt in God's future because we are thankful for God's past.
 4. And all of us have things that God has already done for us and with us, or we wouldn't be here today.

- C. So today we give thanks for the spirit of exaltation which will sustain us through the tough times that we will remember in the week ahead.
- D. In that same spirit of exaltation, we will give thanks for all that God has already done for us, all of which is simply a foreshadowing of the greatest gift of all which we will remember again next Sunday.
- E. And we give thanks for the Psalms, for what they teach us about being honest with God as we walk with him through all the circumstances of life.
- F. May we come to know God in our hearts and in our prayers and in our lives as deeply as those who wrote these powerful prayers of the people.

