**Message: "The Cheerers and The Jeerers"**

Matthew 21:1-11; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Matthew 27:1-2,11-50; Matthew 21:1-11,

Mark 11:1-10, Luke 19: 28-39, John 12: 12-18; Zechariah 9:9

Father God, Lord Jesus, we have gathered to praise and glorify you, speak to us where we are, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen. Amen.

 Today is the first day of Holy Week, Palm Sunday. The week leading up to Jesus going to the cross, and the great resurrection of Jesus from the dead that changed mankind forever. Giving us an opportunity to choose a changed life!

 The triumphal entry of Jesus is recorded in all four Gospels that is important. Matthew 21:1-11,

Mark 11:1-10, Luke 19: 28-39, John 12: 12-18 His entry was history making. Can you picture it, people everywhere because of Passover? Packed like New Year's Eve in Time Square.

 Temples full, people caught up in the moment. The emotion of the day was running high, full throttle like high caffeine drinks. Throwing cloaks and palm branches down in front of Him.

 Crowds can be scary. Sometimes supportive. There are cheering crowds. And there are jeering crowds. There is a "crowd mentality".

 You've heard of "mob rule". That's the mentality of a crowd. There is no space for individual thoughtfulness. No time for reflection. Just immediate and mass response.

 One thing that's been true, from the very moment the first crowd gathered. And that is this: There are usually two sides in a crowd. Whether it's a packed stadium for a baseball game, or a political rally, there are those for, and those against. There are the cheerers and the jeerers.

 And sometimes one side or the other takes over. Sometimes, you get a crowd that becomes either supportive, or hostile. And often, the balance is delicate and fragile. A crowd can turn on you.

 The crowd that Jesus faced in these days at Jerusalem was both. It started off as a cheering and supportive crowd. And that's the crowd we meet today, Palm Sunday.

 But, in a very few days these same people are going to be a very different sort of a crowd for Jesus!

 The event carried mixed-feelings and had a mixed crowd. Some yelling Hosanna Some yelling “Who is this?” There was a disconnect of the people.

 Hosanna is defined as an expression of adoration, praise, or joy.

 Some loved Him. Some hated Him. Some didn’t know Him. Some didn’t want to know Him. Some believed that He would not affect their lives at all. They needed a Christ Awakening. Just as we do in America today.

 Jesus drew people to Himself, this One who called Himself the "Son of Man". People came from long distances to hear Him. To see Him. To witness the amazing things, He was doing. To hear the great, inclusive, and loving message He shared.

 But as in any crowd then and now you get two kinds of people the believers, and the doubters. We see this quite often in the Bible when we are told of the reaction of the crowds, the behavior of the onlookers.

 For example: There is the account in John chapter 9 when Jesus healed the man born blind by making mud with dirt and spit and anointing his eyes.

 In this passage we see four different reactions to Jesus. The neighbors revealed surprise and skepticism; the Pharisees showed disbelief and prejudice; the parents believed but kept quiet for fear of excommunication; and the healed man showed consistent, growing faith.

 Each reaction to Jesus allowed the man to reach a clearer understanding of the one who had healed him.

 Jesus taught commitment. If you follow Him, it affects your whole life. As in Galatians 3:28 *“There is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus".*

 The man’s new faith was severely tested by some of the authorities. He was cursed and evicted from the synagogue.

Some for, some against.

The cheerers and the jeerers.

 Let's look past Good Friday, past Easter, to the events of Pentecost to the time when the Spirit descended on the believers like tongues of flame and they began to praise God and speak in other languages, we discover that some of the onlookers saw it as a miraculous event. To others it was just a big drinking party! "They are filled with new wine."

 But you know as a crowd takes shape, as "mob rule" comes into effect, the sentiment of the crowd solidifies. The mind of the crowd moves to one side or the other of an issue. It can be very frightening.

 And if you're in such a crowd there's only a couple of "safe" ways to behave. You can either go along with the crowd or keep quiet and leave inconspicuously.

 Some interesting experiments have been conducted by American psychologists to understand crowds. These experiments show how readily people will change their opinion to match the crowd. They don't pretend to change their opinion, to fake it. They really change their minds.

 The experiment was simple. A bunch of people were seated in a dimly lit room. Onto a screen at the front of the room two straight lines were projected. One was obviously longer than the other.

 The task was simple. State which line was longer. However unknown to the one subject of this experiment (let us say unknown to you) all of the other people in the room were involved in trickery. They had been told to lie.

 So, you had twenty or so other people around you, saying that line A was the longer one. Everybody else in agreement. And you can see clearly that line B

is longer.

 What happens? Well, the experiment showed that you change your opinion, that's what. Pure and simple. And even after the experiment is finished, and you are told what was going on you still hold to your changed opinion. That line "B" was longer.

 That's how persuasive the effect of a crowd is. It will even sway you to an obviously wrong opinion and keep you there. My mind is made up, don't confuse me with the facts

 There was a big crowd in Jerusalem that day. Lots of people who didn't even know who Jesus was even though He'd been the talk of the city in recent weeks.

 It was at Passover time, when many Jews from the countryside would be there celebrating this special feast. There would be Jews from faraway places too.

 Honoring their religious beliefs by travelling the great distances to Jerusalem, perhaps only once in their lifetime. Going to the Holy City for the most Holy of Feasts the Passover. And this crowd this day was in a happy mood. They're ready for a parade! They are ready to celebrate.

 And Jesus knowing the mood of the city just before Passover knowing the prophecies concerning how the Messiah would enter Jerusalem and knowing

what would come later rides into the city on a donkey his disciples beside him.

 For those who have eyes to see it is significant this choice of animals. Conquering heroes, generals, and kings ride into town on horses on stallions. The Messiah comes in a humbler fashion on a donkey.

Just as predicted by the prophets.

 Matthew 21: *1 As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. 2 "Go into the village over there,” He said. “As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to Me.*

 *3 If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will immediately let you take them.” 4 This took place to fulfill the prophecy from Zechariah 9: 9 that said, 5 “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.*

 "Hosanna" they shouted "Hosanna in the highest Heaven". "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord".

 The disciples must have thought they had it made. Success at last! Where are those arrogant Pharisees now? We've got it made with Jesus! The people are all for him. They recognize that He is the promised one the Son of David it won't be long now everything is going to go our way.

But Jesus knew what was to come.

 *8 Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.*

 *9 Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, “Praise God for the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD! Praise God in highest heaven!” 10 The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as He entered. “Who is this?” they asked. 11 And the crowds replied, “It’s Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*

 He knows even as the people shouted on Sunday Hosanna in the highest hosanna to the Son of David Blessed is, He who comes in the name of the Lord. What was to come on Friday.

 He knew what the same crowd would shout out when Pilate asked them "What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?"

 He knew that they shout out "Let Him be crucified!" And that when Pilate asked, "Why, what evil has He done?" they would shout all the more, "Let Him be crucified!"

 And so, Pilate released Barabbas for them and after flogging Jesus, he handed Him over to be crucified.

 How quickly things can change. One week a hero, the next just another victim, a person, an object, to be spat upon and scorned to be beaten and killed.

 And yet here we are today the Sunday before the Friday. With our palm crosses singing praises to Jesus with our children.

 We have cheered with the crowd that cheered for Jesus and rightly so for Jesus deserves all our cheers.

 But we have also cheered with a heart heavy with the knowledge of what is to come.

 In that we are closer to Christ and His knowledge of the real situation than the disciples were.

Jesus knew who He was dying for

 He knew that Judas would betray Him,

 that Peter would deny Him,

 that the disciples would abandon Him

 and that crowd would call for His death.

He knew what was to come and yet He ate and drank with Judas

 He knew and yet He prayed with Peter

 He knew and yet He called all

 the disciples His friends

He knew and yet He taught in the marketplace

 and healed those who came to Him.

Jesus knew and we know.

 We know His part and we know our part and knowing we celebrate Jesus as we must celebrate.

 We must cheer for life, knowing that death follows. We must praise Jesus and call Him Lord even knowing that we like all the others have failed Him and will fail Him again.

 We must cheer, and we must remember, always remember that Jesus knows who we **were**, He knows who we **are**, He knows what we have done and will yet do, and He still lays down His life for us.

 Today you received palm crosses so that we might celebrate a token memory of the cheering crowd on Palm Sunday when they lovingly spread palm branches and cloaks into the roadway ahead of our Savior.

 Look at what you hold perhaps you have placed it on a seat beside you...

 The palms of "hosanna"! The palms of this "day of acceptance" of our Lord. Are woven into the cross of rejection.

 And yet, it is an empty cross this cross you hold, a cross of resurrection, a cross of forgiveness.

 It is a very holy mystery this cross that you hold this cross upon which Jesus died.

 It is a mystery which the crowd can never quite accept. A mystery which you and I cannot truly understand, but when we accept it in faith in our heart of hearts it turns earthly despair into heavenly triumph.

 Hosanna Jesus! Hosanna in the brief moment of earthly acclaim. Hosanna blessed are you who comes in the name of the Lord to save and deliver Your people. Blessed be your name now and forevermore. Hosanna in the highest heaven. Amen!