

I love history, I loved it in high-school and when I went to McMaster that became my major. But I also had to take courses in other disciplines. I choose to take some psychology courses. While taking those psych courses, I read some very interesting experiments.

One such experiment was, to my thinking, very simple. A group of 12 people were sitting in a dimly lit room. Projected onto a screen were two lines (line A [short] line B [longer]). One was obviously longer than the other. The task was simple, which line was longer?

The psychologist who was conducting this experiment wanted to gain a better understanding of crowds. He was trying to see how readily people would change their opinion to match the crowd. And I don't mean, pretend to change their mind, to fake it. I mean - really change their mind.

The experiment was fixed, because there was really only one subject in the room; everyone else was in on the experiment. The subject thought line B was longer while everyone else said line A was longer. Those who were in on the experiment convinced the subject that line A was longer.

The experiment showed that you change your opinion, because of the other people in the room. 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 "A" 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. We call that "crowd mentality".

Crowd mentality can lead to "mob rule". In a mob, there is no space for individual thought. No time for reflection, because the crowd's response is immediate, with no time for reflection as witnessed in 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia.

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 football game, or the people protesting the *Unite the Right* rally being held in Virginia. There were the cheerers [yea!] and the jeerers [boo!].

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.

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The crowd that Jesus met on Palm Sunday was supportive. The crowd we read about were cheering - they were encouraging.

Jesus attracted that crowd.

He was a most charismatic person, he was the One who called himself the "Son of Man". People from far and wide came to hear and see him. To witness the amazing things, he was doing. The great and inclusive and loving addresses he gave. To see the miracles, he was known to perform.

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

For example: When Jesus healed the blind man with dirt and spit, some of the Pharisees believed it to be a great miracle. Some believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

And some did not believe. The non-believers kept questioning the healed man. And his parents. And his neighbours. And then they accused both him and Jesus of being an agent of the Devil.

Some for, some against. The cheerers - and the jeerers.

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 of an issue or to the other side. It can be very frightening. And if you're in such a crowd, there's only a couple of "safe" ways to behave. Either go along with the crowd, or keep quiet.

If you don't agree, better stay silent, or leave - inconspicuously.

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 the time of Passover, when many Jews from the countryside would be there - celebrating this special feast.

There would be Jews from places far, far away. They were honouring their religious beliefs by traveling great distances to Jerusalem, perhaps only once in their lifetime. Going to the Holy City for the holiest 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 with his disciples beside him.

For those who have eyes to see, it is significant this choice of animals. Conquering heroes, like generals and kings ride into town on horses, on white stallions, if they have one. The Messiah comes in a humble fashion, on a donkey. Just as predicted by the prophets.

And on this day, and on this crowd, the Spirit of God had descended. "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. The people recognize that he is the promised one, the Son of David and it won't be long before everything is going to go, our way.

But Jesus knew what was to come.

He knew even as the people cheered for him Sunday - what was to going to happen on Friday. 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 today, the Sunday before **FRIDAY**, we are waving our palm leaves and singing praises to Jesus, with our children.

We have cheered with the crowd that cheered for Jesus because Jesus deserves all our cheers.

Today we cheer, but we are closer to Christ and we have the knowledge that his disciples did not have - and as a result, our cheering is a little restrained, because we know what is to come.

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 the 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 have celebrated and I say to you - 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 may yet fail him.

We must cheer, and we must remember. We must remember that Jesus knows who we were - and who we are and what we have done and will yet do. And he will still lay down his life for us.

Today, we are cheerers. Tomorrow and in all your tomorrows, try and resist the mob mentality that tries to push you towards becoming a jeerer. Remember what Christ did for all and help the *jeerers* become *cheerers* for Christ.