

The Seduction of the Palms Luke 19:28-40

A couple of years ago people used to say: “Give it up” to introduce a piece of music that was about to be played or to bring out a person who would be making a presentation. “Give it up for Valetta and the Chancel Choir” and you’d applaud or scream and yell and jump up and down or do whatever you could to show that you were excited to see this person or hear this particular song.

If that phrase was around a couple of thousand years ago in Jerusalem someone in the crowd might have yelled “give it up for Jesus” as he rode into town on the back of a donkey. Along with waving palm branches and throwing down garments, the hosannas and alleluias of the assembled admirers would have been construed as “giving it up for Jesus.”

After all, this was an exciting time. Jesus of Nazareth was an exciting guy. He had the spunk to stand up to the self-righteous Pharisees. He made the little people feel as important as the powerful and wealthy. He spoke with so much authority that even Roman soldiers seemed to listen to him. He befriended everybody, saint and sinner alike.

And the stories about what he did for people! He healed the sick. He gave sight to the blind. He could touch someone’s crippled limb and make it healthy. He made dead people come back to life. **“Give it up for Jesus!”**

Some people went so far as to say that Jesus was the promised Messiah — the long-awaited Savior of the people; the one who would lead Israel back to the greatness it had known under kings such as David and Solomon. So why not “give it up” for Jesus?

If all this was true — the stories, the speculation, the miraculous abilities — then Jesus deserved complete devotion and loyalty. This was Jesus’ day, and this crowd was Jesus’ greatest fan club. Jesus deserved a welcome fit for a king, and more. For Jesus was truly sent by God. Or, so it seemed ... for the moment.

And this is precisely the temptation that Jesus faced on that day: to be who the people wanted him to be and not be who he really was. The temptation to give in to the desires of the crowd; to be worshiped and lifted up as a great charismatic leader; to fulfill the political agenda that others had in mind; to free the people from the Romans, rather than their own sinfulness. The temptation was there to exploit his equality with God.

It was at this very point in his ministry, in his life, that **Jesus “gave it up” for the people**. He had to empty himself and become their servant, not their king. He had to humble himself completely and walk through the next six days not only as one of them, but as one who would be thoroughly humiliated, condemned, and executed as a criminal. Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, handled like human garbage so that the powers that be might prove him weak and ineffective.

None of us go to a parade to give it up. None of us really go to see anyone famous or notorious give it up. We go to receive. We go and stand in line and pay our money to be entertained. We wait for hours to get a glimpse of some celebrity, and if we’re lucky, an autograph or some piece of memorabilia we can take home with us. We want to get something for our efforts.

Those people standing along the roadside on Palm Sunday were willing to give it up for Jesus but wanted something in return. They would cheer Jesus along the way as long as he took them where they wanted to go. They would support Jesus as long as he fulfilled the role they had picked out for him. But let Jesus waver from the path they wanted him to walk down, and suddenly he'd be walking alone.

We humans are a fickle lot. We listen to speakers to hear what they have to say to us, not about anybody else. We want politicians to tell us things that are going to make our lives better, not necessarily things that will improve the world. We want instructors to teach us things we want to learn, not necessarily things we need to learn.

We want preachers to tell us we're doing good things and that we're headed in the right direction that will ultimately get us to heaven. We don't necessarily want to hear the truth. If a speaker doesn't have something to say to us, something that will directly affect our lives in the way we want them affected, we tune them out.

As a speaker, Jesus was no exception. As long as he kept the people entertained, they were happy. As long as he promised them a better life, they were interested. As long as it appeared he might be the one to set them free from the occupying army of the Romans, they followed him. But as soon as he was tested and failed their test, he was abandoned.

How many times have we said, "Jesus could have ..." or asked, "Why didn't Jesus...?" We think that if we were writing the script, we could have done a much better job. That's what some of Jesus' contemporary temporary followers thought, too. Judas even tried to rewrite the ending by forcing Jesus' hand. It didn't work.

Jesus didn't give in to the seduction of the palms. He didn't drift off the course his Father set for him. He could have. But he didn't.

He could have taken the throne that the Palm Sunday crowd wanted him to sit in, but he didn't. He could have led Israel to worldly dominance by crushing the Roman Empire with the mighty hand of God, but he didn't. He could have healed the nation of pestilence and disease, but he didn't.

He could have fed all the hungry of the world with a bumper crop of manna from heaven, but he didn't. He could have eradicated evil from the face of the earth and set up his kingdom right then and there, but he didn't.

He could have. But he didn't. He didn't because he was Jesus. And **doing what people wanted wasn't what Jesus wanted to do**. Jesus wanted to be obedient to the will of the Father, even to the point of death on a cross.

In our human fickleness, we are so controlling. Hidden behind the Palm Sunday crowd's exuberance were a controlling people willing to manipulate the events at hand in order to determine a future that would benefit them.

Is that any different than today? Individuals use others to get what they want. Governments use other governments and even their own citizens to get what they want. And we adopt the philosophy that the ends justify the means, as long as the ends are in our favor.

Jesus didn't give in to that philosophy. For Jesus, the means to the end that was the path to Calvary. For Jesus, it was a trail of complete self-denial and sacrifice. For Jesus it was to deny the adulation of the crowds in order to allow for the glorification of God.

Jesus resisted the seduction of Palm Sunday. And because he was able to overcome any inkling to give in to his ego, he was able to fulfill his purpose on earth. As a lamb

sacrificed on the altar, Jesus was given over to the enemy and died for our sins — crucified for us that we might have everlasting life.

And God exalted him. God, not the people in the crowd, gave him a name that is above every other name that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, not just on earth, but under the earth and in heaven as well; and every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord.

“Give it up” for Jesus. And the way to do that is not by being his cheering section, not by lining the streets and getting caught up in crowd hysteria.

To give it up for Jesus, we focus on the same urgent mission that He came to accomplish: the salvation of all humankind and living a life that screams and shouts the name of Jesus with every kind act we do and every caring word we speak.

In short, we “give it up for Jesus” ... by giving up “ourselves.” Amen.