

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

Sermon Title: "Shouts and Wonder"

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Can you feel the energy that welcomed Jesus as he triumphantly entered Jerusalem? Can you imagine the throngs of people gathering ahead of Jesus and those who were following close behind, trying to get a glimpse at this prophet, this teacher, this Messiah? Can you feel the reverberations of the cheers and shouts of the crowd, "Hosanna, Hosanna"? Can you feel those words resonate within you as the crowd celebrated Jesus? Whether they all knew exactly what Jesus had come to do, or whether their lives had been touched by his teachings or his healings, or perhaps they were simply caught up in the fanfare of this welcome, all who gathered were celebrating the arrival of Jesus and their voices rose in shouts of praise! Can you feel it – this energy that had the whole of Jerusalem then asking "who is this?" as their curiosity and wonder were sparked? And maybe, some were wondering about Jesus simply out of curiosity about the parade going past their homes or wondering why life in the city was being disrupted in this way and yet, others still I would guess, were wondering what they were missing and how they could be a part of it – but no matter what they were thinking – the truth remains that the entrance of Jesus disrupted the norm, throwing the city into turmoil, as they shouted and wondered about this Christ. The entire city of Jerusalem felt the energy of that day, can you?

My guess is that, while we were obviously not there to feel the powerful entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, we all have experienced moments in our lives where the presence of a crowd was felt powerfully within us. I bet that we have all had moments when we have felt the mighty cheers of a crowd and whether we were part of the crowd or looking in wonder, we have felt such power; maybe at a sporting event when the stadium bursts forth in celebration at the latest score (I know that there were a lot of exciting games past week that I am sure got many rallying and shouting!). Or maybe you felt such energy in a time of worship, or at a rally crying forth for justice, or in a

special celebration in your life. And in those moments, the presence of the crowd is supporting us – being a part of that crowd encourages us, it strengthens us for in those moments we stand together and we feel the love, the support, the camaraderie with all who are gathered and often times this leads us to feeling like anything is possible.

I remember one such moment in my life when I had attended Urbana while I was in college, which is a World Missions Conference for young adults. And during this nearly weeklong conference, in which almost 16,000 students gathered in St. Louis, the energy of the crowd was intense. Through powerful preachers, speakers, and presenters, through beautiful music and moments of worship, through the sheer presence of 16,000 people speaking, singing, praising together, the atmosphere was alive with encouragement and strength. From all around the world, we gathered to be inspired for the work of spreading God's love and grace out into the world, whether through long-term overseas missions as some were being called or through a recommitment to living our individual lives as a reflection of the life of Jesus, we all wanted to see a better world – a world that reflected more and more of God's kingdom. This is what we wanted – this is what we still want. And it was an uplifting time – one where the 16,000 people who were gathered, their energy, their drive, their voices raised in praise were a powerful witness that could simply be felt in my very being. It felt like we could do anything – that no ill in this world could stand against such a powerful force of people that desired to change the world through the love of God!

And so, that intense experience was wonderful and it felt so uplifting and motivational and then, the conference, of course as in all things, came to an end. And we all scattered back to our homes. The energy dispersed and went it separate ways all around the world and all of a sudden, changing the world seemed so much harder. It felt more daunting and at times, it looked like nothing can be done to change it. Because when the energy disperses, the crowds leave, and it is just you standing alone, what once felt possible with the support of such a large crowd now feels nearly impossible as you face the realities alone.

Today, in our scripture reading, we encounter this large crowd in Jerusalem once more – we encounter their palpable energy and welcome once more as we begin again this sacred journey through Holy Week. And today, we feel the energy of the crowd – a large crowd that joyfully welcomed Jesus, an entire city that is wondering about this prophet, teacher, messiah. But soon, this crowd too will disperse and Jesus will stand alone.

Or will he? With God the Father by his side, all that Jesus has set out to do still seems possible and will be made possible. For Jesus, it was not the shouts and wonder of the crowd that gave him his ultimate strength to do what must be done, it was the love and grace for all of humanity that was in his flesh and bone that strengthened him. It was knowing that God the Father was with him through it all – even to the point of death on a cross – that he was indeed never alone – and the presence of God encouraged him in all that he needed to do.

As followers of Christ, sometimes we need the crowd – the shouts and wonder, the camaraderie, the mutual goal to support us as we strive to do what may sometimes feel impossible as we seek to build up God’s kingdom in the world – after all, this is part of being called into Christian community – Christ realized that we needed to be together and to support one another – this is what we must do! But, even so, there will be times when the crowd begins to thin and the energy disperses, and times when we may feel like we are alone, and in those moments, may we have such faith to still face the impossible – for when it is for God’s good and God’s glory, how can we fail? When we trust that God is by our side through it all, strengthening us and encouraging us, could anything truly be impossible?

As we now continue to journey toward the cross, we know that this crowd that greets Christ today will soon disperse. And we know that those closest to Jesus who will gather with him in the upper room, they too will soon disperse. And then we will approach the cross and the glories beyond. Through it all, may we find strength for the journey, knowing that the shouts of “hosanna” were indeed heard, that our help has

already come, and soon we will shout once more in praise and wonder at the glories yet to come. And may the shouts and wonder of this moment of worship together, embolden us for all that this Holy Week will hold. So be it and may it be so. Amen.