

People in our times are “into” crowds. We are eager to celebrate or protest. We crowd stadiums for ball games. We line the streets for parades. We jam arenas for rock concerts and orchestra halls for symphony. We flock to fairs. We storm shopping malls and department stores for special sales and events. We like to be where the action is.

For the most part we love crowds. We think every crowd is making some sort of statement and we ought to listen. Television reporters and news people go to the streets and parks because they think crowds are news. Crowds reflect public opinion; or so people think.

Unfortunately, in our world big crowds become big problems. What was supposed to be a celebration of the Superbowl victory recently in Philadelphia, became violent and dangerous. Political rallies turn ugly. Why? Because people with opposite political views show up to assert their side of the story and nobody gets heard. Crowds become fighting mobs and there is blood on the streets.

It even happens at ball games. They may not turn violent but they can turn negative at the drop of a hat. I think it is safe to say that NE Patriot fans are as fickle as they come. No team has given its fans more

to cheer and feel good about as the Pats in the last 20 years. This past season, I was watching a game from Gillette Stadium on TV. The teams were heading to the locker rooms at half time. The Pats were trailing and the fans (not all but enough to be picked up on the TV) booed them. Shocking but not surprising.

So, we see that crowds can be very positive in the beginning and very ugly in the end. As usual, Scripture can be helpful in sorting this out.

Let's hear again the gospel passage from Matthew that we just heard.

v6

The *disciples did what Jesus had told them to do.

v7

They brought the *donkey and the*colt to him. Then the *disciples placed their coats on the animals and Jesus mounted them.

v8

A very large crowd of people spread their coats on the road in front of him. And some other people cut branches from trees to put on the road.

v9

Some of the people went ahead of Jesus. Some people followed him. And they were all shouting:

„Praise David's Son!

We pray that God will *bless the man who comes in the *Lord's name!

Praise him in the highest heaven!"

v10

When Jesus entered Jerusalem city, everyone there became very excited. "Who is this?" they asked.
v11

Then the crowds with Jesus answered. „This is Jesus“, they said. „He is God’s prophet who comes from Nazareth town in Galilee district.”

Let’s make sure we get the picture in focus. Jesus is approaching Jerusalem in the last days of his life. He plans on making a dramatic entry into the city. He presents himself as the Jewish Messiah- but not the kind of Messiah public opinion held.

As the Feast of Passover was drawing near, Jews who live within 25 miles of Jerusalem were expected to attend the feast. Plus, throngs of pilgrims from many countries were also streaming into the city. Jesus could not have picked a better time to present himself. He was fully aware that the minds of the Jewish leaders were set against him. He had no reason to expect anything but hostility from them.

But the crowd was of a different mind. The reason we call it Palm Sunday has everything to do with the crowd and how they respond to Jesus. This is the throng who threw down their cloaks along with palm fronds before the donkey to honor Jesus.

This is the crowd who called, Hosanna! Hail to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.” Some people who were caught up in the excitement had to

ask who Jesus was. The fact that they didn't know who he was didn't stop them from cheering him on.

Now let's fast forward to his appearance before Pilate with the crowd still there:

²⁰ The chief priests and the elders, however, had persuaded the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas and the execution of Jesus.

²¹ So when the governor spoke and asked them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' they said, 'Barabbas.'

²² Pilate said to them, 'But in that case, what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Crucify him!'

²³ He asked, 'But what harm has he done?' But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!'

The same crowd that earlier praised Jesus now wants him crucified. Undisciplined crowds can become vicious things.

What is the take away in all of this? What message am I hoping that you leave with today? It is not to avoid crowds, although the older I get, the more I am inclined to avoid crowds.

What I'd like you to take away is this. Listen to the crowds in your life but never, never, sell your soul to them. You are responsible in your life to God, not to a popular or angry crowd. To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus. To be a Christian is to let Jesus in- to live his

message of love, forgiveness, kindness, helping the needy, and reconciliation. Now that's a crowd worth being part of. AMEN