**Not Me!**

*Rev. John Allen*

Every year it strikes me again.

Palm Sunday takes a sharp turn.

One minute we are singing with joy our praises of a triumphant Christ.

And the next we are seeing him taken away to the cross.

As quickly as the crowds gathered, they scattered.

As enthusiastically as they shout Hosanna. Their cries became crucify him.

If it seems like we are trying to, quite literally, rain on a parade.

We are.

At least a little.

It’s a little uncomfortable. And that’s because this is the moment when the story becomes about us.

About people. Like you. And like me.

Here is what happened with that crowd. They got caught up in the excitement.

Maybe they had heard something about Jesus. A man who was finally going to come and set them free. Send the Romans running. Tear down the powerful from their thrones. Fill the belly’s of the poor. Lift up the lowly.

The imagined Jesus, just they way they would want him to be. A powerful king. Come to set things straight.

So they sang. And they danced. The cut down branches and laid them at his feet.

It should have been the first hint that something was wrong when he rode in on a donkey.

An odd choice for the king of kings…

A few nights later. He had dinner with his friends, and he said that he knew one of them would betray him.

One by one they said. “Not me.” “Surely Lord, you don’t mean me.” “I couldn’t.” “I would never.”

Here is what happened with that crowd.

Same crowd. People like you and me.

They got caught up in the excitement.

Because he let them down. Instead of overthrowing the rulers, he was humiliated by them. Arrested. And scourged.

Crowned with thorns. Mocked. Humiliated.

It turns out he wasn’t such a great king after all, they thought. Crucify him.

Those same voices that sang Hosanna, began to call for violence.

Crucify him.

“Not me.” I’ve always think, when I hear this story. “Surely Lord, you don’t mean me.” “I couldn’t.” “I would never.”

And those disciples, who never left his side.

They fell asleep when he needed them most. They fled, as soon as being with Jesus became a liability.

They swore they had never met him.

“Not me.” “Surely Lord, you don’t mean me.” “I couldn’t.” “I would never.”

There are few things that I love more than waving Palms for Jesus. And singing his praises as loudly, as boldly, and as often as I can.

You should do it to. It’s the best.

But here is where the story gets uncomfortable. It takes those enthusiastic palm wavers. The ones who sing God’s praises as loud as they can. Whose love for Jesus sends them scurrying up trees to cut down branches to line his way.

It takes those enthusiastic, faithful people. People like you and me.

And it shows how, when the stakes get’s high, when the road becomes hard, when and crowd turns.

They crumble. They falter. They fail. And they flee.

“Not me.” “Surely Lord, you don’t mean me.” “I couldn’t.” “I would never.”

So here is the challenge posed to each of us, and encapsulated so well in our Children’s prayers.

To be enthusiastic in our praise and devotion, yes.

But to also be steadfast. Keeping ourselves awake to the pain of the world.

To have the courage to be servants of those who are oppressed and marginalized.

To cultivate our conviction to speak honestly, even when the truth is unpopular.

To walk faithfully, even when the road gets hard. And even when the crowd starts going another way.

And to remember this:

Christ did not betray the one who betrayed him, and neither will he betray our trust.

Christ did not deny those who denied him, and neither will he deny us.

Christ did not abandon those who left him, and he will not abandon us. No matter what.

It’s up to us to strive each day to live lives worthy of such a great love.