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Palm Sunday 2010

Every once in a while on the way home after church I manage to catch on CBC Radio The Vinyl Café – do you know it? It's the brainchild of Stuart Mclean and it's about the adventures and misadventures of a man called Dave, his wife Morley and their children Sam and Stephanie.

One of my favourites was when he was on holiday with the family and for some reason they take the family cat – and the cat hates being in the car and so is biting and scratching everyone and occasionally makes a leap for the back of Dave's head as he's driving the car.

And because of this bad tempered cat Dave takes a wrong turn onto a one way street and suddenly find themselves smack in the middle of a parade – and there's no way out of it.

And there they are – with Morley trying to read the map and make helpful suggestions and Sam the teenager slumping deep down in the back seat and dying of embarrassment and Stephanie waving at the crowd because they're all waving at them because everyone now they're a float in the parade.

And poor Dave – trying to figure out how he got in this parade with a cat clinging onto his head. It's a wonderful show but dangerous to listen to at high speeds on the highway!

Well today, parades are the focus of the gospel as Jesus comes into Jerusalem and the question today is why are these people in the parade in the first place?

Today we get the story of the crowd that watches Jesus come into the city and they're crying out to him and they're cheering and joining the parade. And they're following and waving palm branches and throwing their cloaks on the road so Jesus can get the red carpet treatment.

And the call out to him saying “God bless the king! God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” And this is the

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same crowd that greets Jesus and it's also the crowd that turns up to call for his death just a few days later on...

And the question today is why do they join the parade? How did they get there? And what is it they are looking for? Whatever they were looking for it seems that they thought they found it in Jesus – one of the clues as to what they were looking for is in the word “Hosanna” – people called out “Hosanna” - that's a Hebrew word that means “Save us!” “Help us!” “Deliver us!” It's really a call for help and as Jesus enters the Holy City the crowds are crying out to him “Help us!” “Save us!” and they are calling out to him.

And the question is what is it they want out of Jesus? What do they want to be saved from? Well, probably from many things but most of all from the fact that there was an enemy within the gates and the enemy is Rome. They were a conquered people – an occupying army ruled the land their leader was a puppet king they had to live under laws they didn't like and under customs that weren't theirs and their religion was defiled because of these invaders – “Save us Jesus from this!”

Perhaps they are in the parade calling out for change – for fairness wanting to do away with corruption within their religion – calling for Jesus to make sweeping changes and religious reforms – to make the Temple clean hoping Jesus would be a man who would say to the people “It's time to clean house”.

Perhaps people cried out for hope. Life in Jesus' day was hard. People suffered a lot more than they do now people who got sick were literally excluded and shoved out of the community. Women were pushed to the back without rights or even allowed to own property. Perhaps people cried out to Jesus to restore hope to them – maybe that's why they joined the parade.

As you know, crowds are fickle and crowds turn nasty when they don't get what they hoped for or what they expected.

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The gospel asks us a question and that is why are you part of the parade? Why is it that you are following Jesus Christ? How did you get into the parade and what's more what keeps you in it... and "What are you wanting out of Jesus? Why do you say 'Hosanna?' What are you needing saving from?" These are important questions that we need to ask ourselves as we enter into Holy Week.

And each of us will answer the question differently – but perhaps another question that needs asking on Palm Sunday is "Are you going to stay in the parade? Everyone knows how much fun parades are when the sun is shining and the sky is blue – but what about further down the road? We saw what happened to the crowd by the time we got to Good Friday.

To be a strong follower of Jesus – being part of the parade if you will - means knowing why you in the parade and being committed to following in the parade even when being a disciple is difficult such as now.

I remember when I was a student in Vancouver. One of the downtown churches did a "Walk of the Cross" through the streets into the East Side and some really rough parts of the city. I went with some friends because I thought it would be interesting and hitting the streets was better than having to hit the books.

The atmosphere was light – a parade of about sixty to seventy people. We rather smugly saw ourselves as making our presence known as Christians. And then things changed when some of the street people jeered at us and when we passed under a bridge and a man emerged from the shadows and started yelling at us things like – "Why are you here? Who do you think you are? What have you ever done for us – where are you the rest of the time? Get out of here – You're not welcome here this is our home!"

I think he was an actor planted by the event organizers but I am not completely sure. And as we paraded back to our cars we were a much more somber group. Because the man had a point he

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challenged us to ask ourselves are we true followers or were we fair weather friends of Christ - “Just why were we in the parade?”

Amen.

Rev. David Peterson