

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *The Crowds (Palm Sunday)*

**SERIES:** *Easter*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 26:47; Matthew 27:15-23*

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*\*Credit to*

Well good morning, I am so excited to worship with you today.

Today is a special week in the life of the church. Today is **Palm Sunday**, set aside to remember Jesus entry into Jerusalem the week that he would eventually be crucified.

I'll just remind you, it was also during that week, that Jesus shared a meal with his Disciples in an upper room and washed his disciple's feet. We also try to remember that significant act. So on Wednesday you are invited out to the church, 6pm. We'll be meeting in the gym for what we call **Love Feast**. We'll eat a meal together. And then after the meal we'll separate into two groups: men in one room and women in another, and we'll wash feet.

If washing feet is new to you or sounds a little bit uncomfortable or gross. That's ok. That's a perfectly normal response. But there are lots things we do in life, not because we want to but because we need to, it's good for us.

We don't do this kind of thing because we have a foot fetish, but we believe it's good for us. More than that, we do it because Jesus said it's good for us. Just think what it must have been like for Jesus? He came from a heavenly throne room, but was born to a peasant couple in an animal feeding trough and then knelt before his servants to wash their feet. *"Now that I your Lord and Master have washed your feet,*

*you also should wash one another's feet.*" And we're a church knowing, loving and following Jesus.

So please come on out. By the way if you've never been to a washing service...basically it involves, one person will wash my feet and I will wash the feet of one other person. I suggest you come, eat the meal and then sit and watch while others wash feet.

And of course next Sunday is Easter. And we always hold a special sunrise service on Easter morning. So you can come on out, we'll be outside in the parking lot at 6:45am, as the sunrises we spend a few minutes together, singing songs and reflecting on that very first Easter morning. And Jesus once said, "man does not live on bread alone" and we take him at his word, so there will be donuts and coffee, available right after that sunrise service.

Well, we've been walking through this series called "once and for all" (**SERIES TITLE SLIDE**). The resurrection happened once but it was for all people. And we've been looking at some of the characters in the Easter story that were impacted by Jesus around the time of his death and resurrection.

This morning, as we remember Palm Sunday we're going to focus our attention, not on a specific person, but on **the crowds** that showed up at various times throughout Easter week. And what we're going to discover this morning is that there are two very different crowds in the Easter. And we'll be forced to ask ourselves, "Which crowd are we part of?"

And so to get us started I actually want to jump past the Palm Sunday crowds and start with the crowds around Easter weekend first.

Go with me if you would to this scene where Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night that he is arrested. He's there to pray with his disciples, and while he's there, listen to what happens...**Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.** (Matthew 26:47)

Next chapter, same crowd...

**Matthew 27 - <sup>17</sup> So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"**

And the crowd, persuaded by the religious leaders, shouts for the murdering criminal Barabbas to be released and Pilate asks,

**<sup>22</sup> "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?"  
They all answered, "Crucify him!"**

**<sup>23</sup> "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.  
But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"**

There is a warning here for all of us, about

### **1. When the crowds get it wrong.**

When crowds get it wrong, they turn into mobs.

Mobs are dangerous because they no longer evaluate or think about the information they are receiving...they are simply, blindly following along.

**“The crowd is stirred into a frenzy, willing to believe the worst about the best regardless of the facts. Passion overrides judgment. Psychology has demonstrated that it takes only a handful of people positioned in strategic places to start a riot.”**

Maybe you’ve heard of mob psychology or **herd mentality**...basically means that other people have an influence on me and my behavior.

Kind of the classic analogy people use is: “If everyone was jumping off a cliff (without a parachute), would you jump off also?” And in one sense we think, we are way too reasonable and independent to succumb to something that foolish. But studies have been done on just how easily we follow the behavior patterns of the people around us.

I was reading about a study that National Geographic did on this concept. They had a group of people sitting in a doctor’s office that were all “in on” the study. A stranger walks into the doctors office, who is completely unaware. Those “in on” the study act as if they don’t know each other. It’s just a typical quiet doctors office. Every few minutes a beep comes across the intercom system. Every time the beep happens, those in on the study all stand up and then sit back down. The stranger, confusedly watches. After about 3 or 4 beeps, the stranger, without any sort of reasoning, but simply in “following the crowd”, starts to stand up at the sound of the beep as well.

Several years ago, we were on a youth group trip. And myself and another youth leader were walking out front. And we had a whole herd of teenagers following behind us. The youth leader says, “*Watch this.*” He says, “*In about 50 feet. I’m gonna stop suddenly, and pretend that there’s something in our path. An invisible fence. And I’ll take a big step over it. You do the same thing and we’ll see how many teens follow suit.*” No joke. Almost, every teen after us walks to this point in the sidewalk and stops, looking for the invisible fence. Some even step over, the fence they can’t see. Why? Herd Mentality. It happens to all of us...we just do what the people around us are doing, without thinking.

But that's essentially what happens with these crowds at the end of Easter week. They are stirred up by the religious leaders and just blindly fall in line. Barabbas became the popular choice and following the herd mentality these crowds...freed the guilty murderer and crucified an innocent man!

When a group of people, a crowd, unites around a wrong idea, it can be devastating.

When followers of Jesus, unite around wrong ideas, it can be devastating. We end up justifying wrong and find confidence in others who are blindly following this same pattern.

Where was the church when **Hitler** was murdering millions of Jews? Where was the church during the **Salem witch trials**? Where was the church during **North American slavery**?

Blindly stirred into a frenzy, believing the worst, ignoring the facts...following the crowd.

What is the church crowd doing today? Where do we need to be aware of our blind spots/herd mentality?

I'll just tell you one area where I think we really need to be careful as a Christian community is our sources of information. If I only ever listen to one source of information, if that's the only voice I hear, I am danger of blindly following that crowd. We need to be thoughtful and attentive to the crowds that we are associating with and following along.

When a group of people, a crowd, unites around a wrong idea, it can be devastating. Warning for us about herd mentality. But this isn't the only crowd

## **2. When the crowds get it right.**

Let's go to Palm Sunday (**Matthew 21**). Jesus and his disciples are approaching Jerusalem. Jesus tells two of the disciples to run ahead and find a donkey and bring it back to him. He will ride the donkey into the city of Jerusalem.

**<sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,**

**“Hosanna<sup>[b]</sup> to the Son of David!”**

**“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”<sup>[c]</sup>**

**“Hosanna<sup>[d]</sup> in the highest heaven!”**

**<sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”**

**<sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”**

First thing I want us to notice about the Palm Sunday crowd, is that this crowd has gathered because they share a common purpose, goal, belief.

**a. Crowds share a common interest.**

Crowds create this sense of belonging, a reminder that **we are part of something that is much bigger than ourselves.**

Imagine, for a moment that Jesus enters Jerusalem and there is only one person standing there waiving a palm branch. It's not nearly the same scene. The Religious leaders would not care. The Roman authorities would not care. But when the whole

city is stirred, where there is a crowd, you know there is something much bigger going on.

The Palm Sunday crowds have arrived to celebrate Jesus as the Messiah.

For the Jews, so much symbolism in Jesus entrance into the city.

The Palm Branches **(PIC OF PALM BRANCHES)** for example. For hundreds of years the Jews had lived under some form of foreign oppression...Egypt, the Greek Empire, Roman Empire.

In all that time there had only ever really been one successful Jewish rebellion, Judas Maccabeas. For a short time, he had defeated their enemies. When he road into the city of Jerusalem...people waved Palm branches as a sign of his victory. The Palm branches were kind of like this sign, a unifying claim that Jesus will bring victory over their oppressors!

Beyond that Jesus comes riding into town on a donkey **(PIC OF A DONKEY)** which was one of the symbols in Judaism, pointing to the Messiah.

**[Zechariah 9:8-9](#) - Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, was kind of like his claim as the rightful Messiah.

*And then notice, the crowds are shouting “**Hosanna.**” Which was not simply a religious word, it was a political word...literally meaning, “Save us now! Save us now!”*

*So think about this scene: a crowd of Jewish pilgrims, gathering in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, deliverance from Egypt, fueled with religious zeal, waving the symbols of the only successful rebellion in Jewish History, chanting, “Hosanna!” This is a declaration to everyone watching, we are united with the belief Jesus is our true king.*

I'll just tell you, I believe we were created to be part of a crowd.

I was actually reading that US Surgeon general says *“loneliness is more common than heart disease, diabetes or cancer. That statistics suggest loneliness has doubled since the 1980s...with 40% of Americans suffering from loneliness at significant levels.”*  
(Ortberg – Menlo Park Series)

We were created to belong to a group. To know, to recognize, to participate with others in a common interest.

*“Call it a clan, call it a tribe, call it a network, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.”*

(Jane Howard...Ortberg...Everybody's Normal)

Got me thinking about the crowds that I belong to.

I was thinking about this. I am part of the world-wide **soccer crowd**. I am united to billions of people, by this shared interest...the greatest sport on earth. Having grown up in Zambia, Africa (**PIC OF ZAMBIA SOCCER TEAM**) and having been on several cross-cultural missions trips outside of the United States, I can just tell you...there are these incredible moments, where I have been in a completely new and uncomfortable environment. I feel out of place. I don't fit in. I don't look the same. I don't speak a lick of the local language. But if someone get's a little round object, that we can kick. All of a sudden I can become part of the crowd, I belong. I can

speak the language of soccer. I am part of something that is much bigger than just me.

Think about all of the different crowds you are part of. Iphone or Android. Coke or Pepsi. Tea or coffee. Some of you growing up you were part of the Marvel Comic crowd weren't you? You belong to one of those crowds, a group that unites for a common purpose. And in each of those crowds you are reminded that you are part of something that way bigger than just you.

So ready for this, Palm Sunday, there is this reminder for you and me, that there is a **Jesus crowd**. A group of people, who share a common belief that Jesus is the true Messiah and rightful king.

Today, we call that crowd, the **church**. You and me, we are, a continuation of the Palm Sunday crowd. This means that we are part of something that is way bigger than any one of us.

Have you thought about the significance of that statement? Church isn't just about you or me, my individual preferences, desires. It not even just about Five Forks. We are part of something way bigger.

This crowd has been around for 2,000 years. It exists today all over the world, it comes in all different shapes and sizes, languages, preferences, styles of music.

I was think just how individualistic we can be when it comes to church. We begin to judge church by our personal preferences. The music or the lights or the parking spot or my seat in the auditorium.

But, then I remember, church isn't about me. It's about us. I am part of a crowd that is held together by the belief that Jesus is the rightful King. You are part of that crowd. Sometimes the reason you're here isn't actually for you, it's for someone else,

it's for us. We come, we serve, we worship, we pray, we encourage, we give up our preferences because we're part of something that is way bigger than any one of us.

This leads to the second thing we need to notice about that Palm Sunday crowd.

As Jesus entered the city, their common belief and purpose, the realization that they are a part of something much bigger than just themselves led to worship.

### **b. Crowds inspire us to worship.**

The crowds began shouting, singing together as one voice...**“Hosanna, to the Son of David.”** Folks that's a Jewish worship service, right out in the streets of Jerusalem. This is what happens when Jesus crowds get together, we worship with one voice.

I remember the first time, I went to a Penn State Football game (**PIC OF BEAVER STADIUM**). 120,000 people, who are otherwise, completely unrelated, all walk into the stadium together, wearing the same color, the same emblems, with a common purpose in mind.

There's this famous cheer where one side of the stadium shouts...**“WE ARE”** and the other side of the stadium responds with **“PENN STATE”**. It's almost like an act of worship, voices raised as one.

That's the picture I get of Palm Sunday. Everybody came that day wearing their donkey-messiah emblazoned togas. Shouting with one voice.

Every Sunday morning, in some ways, is a replay of Palm Sunday. It's kind of like we join the Palm Sunday choir and continue that worship service. Each week, when we get together we raise our voices in unison. It is our coming together to make a declaration that Jesus is the rightful Messiah. Hosanna to the son of David.

It was about 10 years ago Jenny and I went were on a mission trip in Honduras. Different language, different culture. I shared before that we spent one weekend out in this little rural village, Orocuina (**PIC OF OROCUINA**), that didn't have electricity. We were there over a weekend. And on that Sunday morning we got up to go to their church service. They had no building. It was 100 degrees and no air-conditioning. No auditorium with nice seats to sit in. The seating they did have, were these little tree stumps. No light or sound equipment. I was thinking to myself, how this gonna go? This young man stands up in front of that small little crowd. And says we are here to raise our voices together as one and worship the king. And in broken acapello, the voices of God's people in Orocuina rang out.

When you come in here, we want you to participate with us. Bring your voice, bring your gifts, bring you energy...raise our voice as one to worship the king.

Last thing, about when the crowds get it right. It doesn't come specifically from our passage this morning, but it's just such an important concept regarding crowds getting it right that we need to talk about it.

**c. Crowds are able to do more together than one person can do on their own.**

Can I show you a picture? (**PIC OF 10' WALL**) Back when I was younger, early teens, maybe you remember this as well, team building exercise. You have a group of about 10 people. And you are placed in front of this 10' wall. Height of a basketball hoop. The goal is get your entire team over the wall. For those of us vertically challenged. This is an impossible task...alone. But every year, you put 10 of us together and we'll find a way to get everyone over that wall.

We can accomplish more together, than we can alone.

I was thinking that when "Jesus crowds" really understand this concept, we can have a huge impact on the world. When you recognize you are part of the Jesus crowd,

when we unite around a shared or common purpose, then together we can accomplish something that is so much bigger than any one of us on our own.

I'll just give you one example of how we're trying to do that here at Five Forks. We've been sharing at various times about a mission couple that we support. Steve and Chris Newcomer (**PIC of Steve and Chris**), who have been serving in Mozambique, Africa. A few months ago we were part of an effort to ship a tractor to this mission effort.

Since then this area in Mozambique has been hit with several severe weather storms, including a major cyclone Idai (**PICS OF CYCLONE DAMAGE**). Homes were destroyed, whole herds of animals destroyed. One hospital in the area collapsed, electricity was lost and many patients died and many lives were lost in the flooding.

I gotta tell you when I was reading some of the updates, it was a little overwhelming. And in preparing this sermon I began thinking, what would it be like if I was trying to support the Mozambique mission. I can't do much. I don't have enough resources. I don't have enough time. I was actually thinking that if I was supporting this effort on my own, the village would probably not even know they were getting any support.

But, in midst of this devastation and destruction...we also get these little glimpses of hope. We keep getting email updates with pictures of how finances, some from Five Forks church are being used. We were sent picture of this (**PICS OF people eating piles of food.**)

Do you know why that village got that food, those plates? Because there's a little crowd of people, called Five Forks church (and other churches with us), you and me, get together every Sunday morning and remind ourselves, that we can do more together, as a crowd, than any of us can do on our own. And when we do, when we get it right, our Five Forks crowd feeds hungry people in a little village in Mozambique.

In fact one of the recent emails we received, one of leaders, wrote these words:

“Say thanks to all those brave soldiers in Christ that are praying for us and helping us with finances”

When the Jesus crowd get’s it right, we do more on our own than any of us can do alone.

If you’re not yet, participating in or connected to our crowd here at Five Forks, we want to help you, to be. We can use your help, we need you. Our crowd can do so much more if you choose to get involved. There’s a little red card in the seat pocket in front of you. It’s our serve card. You can choose to join the crowd. We can feed more people. We can serve more people. We can pray, encourage more people.

The crowds on Palm Sunday, they got it right. They united around a common purpose that inspired the worship and celebration of the Messiah the rightful king. Boy when the church starts doing that...it can have a huge impact on the world.

There were two very different crowds present during Easter week. There’s a crowd marked by herd mentality, a crowd that blindly follows. That’s a dangerous crowd that can have a devastating impact on the world.

But there’s another crowd (Palm Sunday) that gets it right and comes to honor and worship the rightful Messiah. We need that crowd. We were created for that crowd. When we get it right, that crowd can have a huge impact on the world around us.

Which crowd are you part of? Which crowd are you participating? To remind us of the right crowd this morning...we are gonna remember our master laying down his rights on our behalf.

COMMUNION.