

“Jesus Fan Club”
Luke 19:28-40
March 28, 2010

Joe is a fan of the Pittsburgh Steelers. I am a fan of Alabama football. Joe is a fan of John Wayne. I am a fan of Julie Andrews. Joe is a fan of Jethro Gibbs on NCIS. I am a fan of Olivia Spencer previously of the Guiding Light. I enjoy being a fan. I’m a good fan too. I relish knowing the behind the scenes tidbits about people I admire. For instance, Crystal Chappell played Olivia Spencer – she’s married to Michael Sabatino and they have two young sons. She drinks Red Bull. She loves cheese. And, she tweeted me once. I’m a good fan. And, I’m not a weirdo stalker fan either. I am content to be impressed with Crystal Chappell from a distance...ok, most of time! I am happy to cheer her on from the sidelines. I’m a good fan. I’m a safe fan. There is a place for all of us good, safe fans.

In fact, there were a lot of us around when Jesus had his day as the grand marshal of the Jerusalem parade. When Jesus came riding into town - his journey almost over – his fans burst into applause. Some people even took off their cloaks –in a world where you generally had only one cloak – and they put their one cloak in the pathway of the donkey that carried Jesus. Others ran to nearby fields and cut branches and leaves to pave the path – like rolling out the red carpet. Then, as if they lost their good sense as excited fans sometimes do, they began to call from the sidelines “Hosanna!” Twenty centuries later, we hear religious meaning in that word, but in the first century world, it had political significance. It meant, literally, “save now,” and it was the term you’d choose to cheer your side to win for you. Go defense! “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna! Go Jesus!” They were good fans.

Most fans can point to a reason for their fandom. The object of their devotion might be beautiful or talented or smart or funny or on a winning streak. They might have fame or fortune. They are people that are a pleasure to watch because they touch something inside of us – whether our gun-slinging wild-west alter ego or just our desire to be somebody else – their lives capture our imagination. That makes me wonder what drove those people to join the Jesus fan club that day. His was not the only parade, not the only celebrity event that was going on during Passover week. There was another. Does the name Pilate ring a bell? Pilate also paraded in that week with an entourage of horses and chariots and gleaming armor. He moved into the city at the beginning of Passover week with all the pomp and circumstance that the Roman military could provide to make sure that nothing got out of hand. Remember what Passover celebrated – when God ‘passed over’ the Hebrews in their captivity, redeemed them, and wiped out the Egyptians. Pilate wanted to make sure that they did not get any ideas about divine deliverance from Rome.

And, those ideas could certainly have been floating around because Jesus was eerily intentional when he entered Jerusalem. He was deliberate in fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. For starters, his mode of transportation was a colt, and if you’ve been in our study of the Minor Prophets – and you did your reading for this week - you know that is a reference right back to Zechariah 9:9 – “Lo, your king comes to you: triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” KING Jesus was coming, and his disciples –good biblical scholars that they were - caught that reference, and oh, they were beside themselves. Would this be the day that Jesus finally showed off his God-given power in a way that went beyond individual healings and actually rocked their world? The possibility was there, and so those disciples start singing – and guess what? Their song is yet another biblical reference from Psalm 118 – “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” And, the

Pharisees –the premier biblical experts- were no dummies – they observed all of this and some of them get nervous because this has all the makings of a political uprising, and they ask Jesus to silence his disciples. And, Jesus quotes Habakkuk 2:11 – “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” All of those biblical references in one passage – one event! Something was going on. Something more than meets the eye. Something that carried God’s fingerprints right into the world. All those good, safe fans were waiting on the sidelines to cheer him on.

In some ways, it must have felt good to have those “attaboys” coming at him. In other ways, it must have been quite lonely to be Jesus even with all those people around. He knew what they wanted from him – same thing most good, safe fans want. A look. An autographed picture. A t-shirt – anything that would allow them to dip their toes in the winning pool. Yet, they were selling themselves short. They were looking for a king much smaller than Jesus.

But, I understand. As the chosen people of God, their lives were a mess. And, God had promised, HE PROMISED, to send them a savior. So, here comes Jesus – a walking, talking scriptural prophecy – and what a relief. I’ll be the first to sign up for his fan club let him do his thing and I’ll just stand right over here with my palm. So, hop to, Jesus. I understand wanting Jesus to give you some relief whether that’s relief from something BIG like the Roman empire or relief from the more mundane burdens like waking up day after day waiting for God to act and not knowing what we are supposed to do next.. Who doesn’t want God to deliver us while we sleep and slip us the answer under our pillows? So, we send in our money and we wait for our autographed picture and we cheer God on.

Those were the people who were standing on the side of the road at the Jesus parade. They wanted someone to save the day only Jesus was interested in saving the souls. They wanted to be a Jesus fan, and Jesus wanted followers – only the following business did not look nearly as glamorous from BEHIND the donkey. From the sidelines, one foot was still in this world with all of its values and judgment. The view from behind the donkey turned all that upside down. Frederick Buechner describes those different views beautifully. “The world says, mind your own business, and Jesus says, there is no such thing as your own business. The world says, Follow the wisest course and be a success, and Jesus says Follow me and be crucified. The world says, Drive carefully – the life you save may be your own, and Jesus says Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The world says, Law and Order, Jesus says Love. The world says Get, Jesus says, Give.”

It’s not hard to understand wanting a king of the world – someone to grant us success and fix our problems - the miracles and the magic. Or, better yet, give us a Messiah who will step right up and rescue the innocent and punish the guilty. And, Lord we do have long lists for you of people who have injured us and we want a Messiah who will see to it that they are exposed for they are and shunned by decent people. Hosanna! You wait for the Messiah judge who does not seem to ever show up and you wonder if there is any justice in this world after all.

If not, then give us a Messiah who will MAKE us be good. Give us a Lord who will take over your mind and body so that you cannot mismanage them anymore, a Lord who will heal you in spite of yourself and not let you make any more mistakes. You want him to do the same thing for the whole world – I mean, one look at the news is enough to convince you that putting human beings in charge of creation surely did not meet God’s hopes and expectations. You will gladly surrender your freedom for a little Messiah security. Save us, Jesus. Go get ‘em.

In the book, “The Last Temptation of Christ,” there is a scene written about Jesus and his cousin, John. It is sunrise. They are high above the Jordan in the hollow of a rock. They have argued all night long about what to do with the world. John’s face is hard and decisive, and from

time to time his arms go up and down as they he were actually chopping something apart. Jesus' face, by contrast, is tame and hesitant. His eyes are full of compassion. "Isn't love enough?" he asks John. "No," John answers angrily. "The tree is rotten. God called me and gave me the ax, which I then placed at the roots of the tree. I did my duty. Now you do yours: Take the ax and strike!" Hosanna, Jesus. Blessed be the one to set this mess straight. "If I were a fire, I would burn," Jesus says. "If I were a woodcutter, I would strike; but I am a heart, and I love."

What a disappointment to his fans. They are shouting, "Hosanna!" We have a winner; and Jesus is looking for the losers. He wanted something from his fans that Crystal Chappell will likely never want from me – their friendship, their utter devotion, and he wanted them to see the world through his eyes. In his eyes, the parade was not the main event.

What loomed large was the brokenness of the people along the way. The widows who've lost their husbands and now live in loneliness and poverty. The orphans in the streets begging for food. The oppressed ones who have been down for so long that they think the only way to a future is through armed revolution or crime. The wealthy ones who've held onto their rights at other's expense. The downtrodden ones who see Jesus riding in but cannot imagine a better life for themselves. Jesus sees the poor people. Hungry people. People who are ostracized and excluded. The religiously unfit are there. So too are the disabled – the paralyzed -the people who have just plain given up.

The Palm Sunday fans are looking at what seems to be the obvious. Jesus is coming to wipe out the Romans, and chase all the bad things away. But Jesus rides on, perceiving what few others dare to see – a world of broken people who need the presence of God in their lives. And so he rides in not to pick up his people's choice award, but to take upon himself their wounds. THAT is his claim to fame. And, the truth is that Jesus doesn't need any more fans. He doesn't need any more people who stay at a safe distance and yell out his name. He needs followers. He needs followers who will go with him to the cross. He needs weirdo stalkers.

What would that look like for you? I don't know – that's between you and Jesus. But, it might look like stalking him. It might look like showing up where he might show up – that will likely be in some kind of service – whether it is helping with an Easter Egg hunt, cooking or washing dishes on Thursdays, showing up on a Saturday for leadership training, or driving 3 hours because a friend needs you to ring a bell on Sunday morning. When you put your needs second and you suit and show up, you might just get a Jesus sighting. When you extend your hand to someone who needs it, you might just get a Jesus sighting. When you take the time to say thank you or even to smile, you might just a get a Jesus sighting. It's not rocket science. It's walking behind a donkey. There is room for all of us in his wake.