

***8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" 10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" 11 The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."***

Steve Urkel, Lindsey Lohan, Sir Mix A Lot, Brittany Spears, and most of the cast from Friends. What do they all have in common? People who were once famous but are now largely forgotten. Maybe you're thinking, "OK, but that's just how it is in pop culture." Ah, but it isn't only in just pop culture. Ernest Messonier was once the most famous/highest-paid painter in the world. No longer. Paul Von Heyse won the Nobel Prize for literature, considered in his time to be the best German author since Goethe, the best writer of the day. Almost entirely unknown today.

Whether its low brow popstars or high-brow artists, fame fades. But usually, not all at once. In each example I gave, the person became less popular gradually, not in a month or a year, but over decades.

Oh, how different it was for Jesus. Jesus's popularity didn't fade over months and years, and decades. Jesus' popularity collapsed. In our text for today, which takes place on Palm Sunday, the crowds jammed the streets in eager expectation to catch a glimpse of Jesus. The long-expected, the highly anticipated, the eagerly awaited Jesus. Yet by the end of the work week, the same crowd who had greeted Him so enthusiastically, enthusiastically as their King, were now just as enthusiastically calling for His death.

Now, how about that? How do you explain such an epic collapse? Especially since this Jesus was so long expected. For hundreds of years, the Jewish faithful had been praying for his arrival. Waiting in watchfulness for the time when the Son of David, the King of Israel, would appear for them. God had made it clear to them that the Messiah was real. The King would be coming, not a might, not an if, only a when. And now, the King is here. The Advent of the King to Jerusalem was here. Jesus Christ of Nazareth is currently riding into Jerusalem, bringing back the memories of when King Solomon had ridden down from the mount of Olives astride a donkey.

Why the collapse? Why the turn from eager anticipation and exuberant reception to violent aggression? The explanation revolves around focus. And it is a problem that is as contemporary as it is ancient. I also believe it has infected you because I know it has infected me.

So let's be surgical; let's dissect the problem of focus in someone else's life so that we may identify it in ours. Our text Matthew 21:9 ***"The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'"***

Here we have a crowd filled with anticipation, all flooding the streets because maybe, just maybe, the Christ is going to be as good as advertised. Perhaps this, the Advent King, will be all we have hoped for.

We sometimes smash those crowds pretty hard when Holy Week comes around. When we compare their Sunday chants of "Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest!" with their Friday screams of "Crucify!"

We think that these people were just there for the fanfare, coming to see and join in the modge of excitement. Crassly we may even believe that these were hypocrites who secretly didn't care about Jesus, and this, this was all just an outward show. And I'll concede that maybe, for some, that's precisely what it was.

But really? Was everyone faking when they chanted "hosanna"? Let's break down exactly what "hosanna" means. The first part means "save," but I wonder if the key comes at the end—na. Save—na. Why na? It means, please. It means now. It has the idea of an imperative. It means, hey, there is an issue here that I can't take care of. It's too big for me for me to handle, so I'm asking, no, I'm begging "hosanna" Save, na. Save now.

On that first Palm Sunday, the streets were choked with people all focused on Jesus as the solution. The long-awaited solution. The highly anticipated solution. And, for as long as the people focused on Jesus as the solution, they were fine. But there was something else that was vying with Jesus for attention.

***"When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred"*** The word for "stirred" is not one of utter excitement. It's a shaking, a quaking—a vibrating. As Jesus enters Jerusalem, there is nervousness. Fear. Disturbance.

Why? Why would this highly anticipated King cause fear? Why would someone who appears to be the long-awaited Messiah bring about this reaction from the people? Well, it's the other things that were there to divert focus. And that something was a problem in the form of Roman soldiers with their long spears and their sharp swords. It was found in the form of a Roman governor with his brutal oppression and his efficient exploitation.

Soon the earthly problem found in the form of those Roman spears crowded out the divine solution found in the form of God's Son. And when the average man and

woman on the street looked at Jesus and then looked at the soldier, the problem seemed bigger than the solution. After being mesmerized by the glint of the Roman gladius, they lost confidence in the God-man astride, a young donkey. They lost sight of the Advent King in and amongst the threats surrounding him.

For the crowds, the moment of collapse occurred when they paid more attention to threats to their peace than they did to the source of their peace. When Jesus came, and it seemed all of a sudden that this King wasn't big enough to fix the things that they thought needed fixing, and fixed in the way they thought it needed to be fixed, they got scared. When the coming Messiah wouldn't do the things that they thought he needed to do, they got angry and bitter, and soon their twisted mouths howled for His death; the very One who had come to save them, the only One who could save them.

Because Jesus didn't come as the King to overthrow the tyrannical governor, he didn't come to dull the points of the spears of the Roman soldiers. He didn't come to usher in a new era of effortless expansion. Jesus was coming to save souls. Jesus came on that donkey to save people from their sins. Jesus came to give the fearful Israelites confidence in their salvation. Jesus came to give his followers reason to rejoice in eternal dwellings. Jesus came to turn the hearts of the Romans to the true King of the universe.

It's been a long time since Romans armed their spears and, shimmering armor and heavy shields, walked the street, marched their beat, but problems still have the power to mesmerize. If we're on the streets of Jerusalem. It's that first Palm Sunday; what are we looking at? Unfortunately, all too often, we end up looking at the spears.

As we enter into the season of Advent, when we spend our time looking at the arrival of Jesus. Are you spending more time gazing at the spears, wishing things would be different than you spend gazing on your Savior? We think, if only there were no sickness if only there was no lay-off, if only things would go back to normal before all of the craziness started. If only my King would find a way to fix the spear tips in my face if he could find a way for me to scrape up enough cash to get good gifts for my loved ones. If only Jesus would give me enough time to finish the things that I need to get done every single day. If only Jesus would find out a way to get rid of the political figure who makes me so upset. If Jesus could just do that, then it all would be better.

It's easy to do that, you know. But I'll tell you something, focusing on problems can never bring you peace.

There is something that can bring you peace. It's a focus on your Savior, entering Jerusalem, humble, and riding on a donkey. Because Jesus didn't come to Jerusalem for just those crowds, just those fearful, just those soldiers, he came for you. He came to save you.

Jesus came to Jerusalem to save them, and Jesus comes to you. He comes to you to give you peace. Peace comes from knowing that whatever sins you have committed, they have been totally paid for. He comes as your King, speaking to you, telling you that whatever troubles may come, they cannot endure, they cannot win. He comes to you with comfort, encouraging you letting you understand by means of his word that because of him, the threats will pass. The shields will be splintered; spears will be broken when you enter into a perfect home with him in heaven.

In this Advent season, as Jesus approaches us, let's approach Jesus. Just like those first Palm Sunday crowds did. And what shall we say? How about we say what they said? "Hosanna." Save. Save now. My brothers and sisters, your "Hosanna" has been heard. Amen.