

## Whose voice will prevail?

A sermon preached by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts on Palm Sunday, March 28, 2010.

*But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he be crucified; and their voices prevailed.* Luke 23:5

Imagine if you had been in Jerusalem that fateful day. As an eyewitness to what happened, it might have seemed to be just another busy day in the old city. You had come up to Jerusalem to wander through the shops along the way. As you approached the gates of the city, you saw the commotion and could hear people talking excitedly about an important person who was being welcomed into the city. You didn't pay much attention to it at first. Jerusalem was used to important people arriving there who were forgotten about the next day. You loved a parade, but you'd seen better ones than this. It seemed to be hastily put together with people chanting something and throwing down their garments and palm branches in front of the man riding on a donkey. When you got up close you saw the compassion in the man's eyes as he passed by. He seemed to have the weight of the whole world on his shoulders. A few days later, you followed the crowd into the courthouse where he was put on trial. It was a mockery of justice. The judge couldn't find the man guilty of any crime, but gave in to the voices of the crowd that prevailed. Afterward they took the man out to a hill and nailed him on a cross to die. You didn't understand what he did to deserve it. After it was all over, you felt different. You felt differently about yourself and your relationship to others. There was urgency about your life and you wanted to be more accepting of others. You had a feeling that you hadn't heard the last that man.

We're not sure why the people went from welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem one day only to call for his execution a few days later. Those who called for his death were most likely a different crowd than the ones who welcomed him into the city. Did his teachings really disturb them or were they just out to get a scapegoat? We don't really know but we do know that Jesus' earthly ministry culminating in his sacrificial death in Jerusalem was a necessary part of his mission. He was willing to follow God's will and at the same time agonized over his rejection and suffering.

Some who witnessed the crucifixion realized that Jesus was innocent. There was the penitent thief on the cross who asked to be remembered and the centurion who proclaimed that Jesus was innocent. What about the disciples? Everyone but the Apostle John fled the scene out of fear, even Peter who once boldly promised that he would not allow anything to happen to Jesus in a weak moment denied even knowing him. Those who called for his execution were most likely the followers of Barabbas who was being held on charges of sedition and conspiracy. When the Roman authorities could not find any crime in Jesus worthy of conviction, Pilate offered to release Jesus but the crowd kept demanding that Jesus be crucified...and their voices prevailed.

How quickly people change, how fickle they can be when justice and common sense are ignored. They go from liking someone until something bothers them and then turn on them and have nothing to do with them. It seems so cruel. Why is it so difficult for people to understand and forgive others as they want to be understood and forgiven? Why is that so difficult?

It is human nature to seek a scapegoat for our own mistakes. We look for someone, anyone else on whom we can lay blame. When two people triangulate a third person on whom they can lay blame, it frees them both of any responsibility. The blame game is played out in different scenarios every day. We have to stop making excuses and blaming others for our own mistakes.

There are those who blame others and those who assume responsibility for their own mistakes. Whose voice will prevail?