

I have always been drawn to Luke's account of the triumphal entry of Jesus into the Holy City. I appreciate his adding the dialogue between Jesus and some of the Pharisees who are there. The other three Gospels omit this portion of the story. I always ask why they want Jesus to silence his followers. What are they afraid of? Why don't they want the crowd to honor Jesus in this way? What harm is it doing?

Let's begin by looking at the story again. This is not a widely publicized event. There have been some preparations on the part of Jesus. A colt has been selected. Arrangements have been made for the disciples to come and take the colt to where Jesus is. The instructions to the disciples are clear. They find things just as Jesus had instructed and when questioned their response satisfies the owner of the colt. Things go just as they have been planned.

The animal does hold significance. When a leader came into a city the animal on which he was riding carried a message. The colt would mean that Jesus was coming into the city in peace: An image that would not be lost with those who knew the traditions of the day. Here a young rabbi comes into the city along with thousands of other pilgrims preparing to observe the Passover within the walls of the city. It was trip Jesus had made before only this time he rides on the back of a colt.

This would probably just be a minor incident, causing only a minor stir, if any. As we have said, thousands of people would be coming into Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. The roads would be crowded with pilgrims from around the region seeking to enter the city. Here a group is having some fun. They have a rabbi seated on a horse and are shouting praises to God. His followers may have called him a King but he is not Herod or any of Herod's associates. He has no rebel band with him. The group includes women and children. They are being peaceful. Let them have their fun. As protests against Rome go, if this is one, it is a minor one. Who cares?

Well, some of the Pharisees do. They want Jesus to silence his followers: *Tell them to be quiet. Don't make any noise. Don't draw attention to yourself or to us.* My image of this is our trying to get children to be quiet. You know, when we want them to be quiet and they feel they want to make some noise! I remember within the last year or so a lawsuit brought by neighbors against a family whose children were making too much noise playing in their own backyard during the day! What do we expect? Children make noise. Or it is like trying to keep a dog from barking. Now some of you have dogs and when I or anyone visits they bark. I expect them to bark at me. If they didn't it would seem strange for that is what dogs do... they bark at people. How can you silence barking dogs or praise to God?

Some Pharisees want this though. They don't want to upset Rome. Or maybe they don't want attention drawn to them. What will people say if they are noticed in the crowd? What if they think they are a part of the celebration? Do you notice

how we don't want attention drawn to where we are when we don't want people to know we are where we are? They might be seen. People might think they are part of the celebration. If you must celebrate, celebrate quietly. Just come in to this city. Forget all this fanfare. Come in quietly, unnoticed. Don't draw attention to us!

What were they afraid of? I have some ideas. Just my ideas but, for me, they all play into the Pharisees wanting Jesus to quiet his followers. For one, they were afraid of the loss of power. Now, some might argue that they did not have a lot of power but they were perhaps leaders in their local synagogues or the Temple. They held some positions of authority just being Pharisees, and with the "political" situation the way it was it would not take much for them to lose what power they had. Now if we have never had any power we can't quite understand what they are afraid of. If you have never been the boss and had to go back to being an employee you may not understand what is happening. We get used to positions of power and privilege and when they are taken away or when they might be taken away... Tell your disciples to be quiet.

Another reason might be that they were afraid of losing the tenuous relationship they had with the Roman officials. This was a strange relationship. Both sides tolerated the other. It was a peaceful co-existence. Rome tolerated more religious freedom with Israel than with the other nations it has captured. There was a live and let live tension. The Jewish leaders tolerated Rome as long as they had their religious freedom and Rome tolerated the Jews as long as they did not rock the boat. Silence is better than upsetting the boat. Keep your disciples quiet.

Still another reason may be they were comfortable with the rules. They knew the rules. A few weeks ago some of you participated in a VBS training session and you played a game. You were not given any rules and immediately some of you began asking what the rules were. How can you play if you don't know the rules? They knew the rules. They knew how far they could go against Rome. They operated within a certain framework and they had grown comfortable with that. Any changes would certainly change the rules. Let's not question, we like things just the way they are. Silence is best.

Do you notice how this all points to "self"? The Pharisees are worried about their positions, etc. They are concerned about how this will affect them! We are not too far from that on many days.

I believe there is another aspect here: Jesus demands a decision. Think about it. You can talk to people about any other religious leader or belief system and they will engage with you and listen and share. They will hear about Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and even share in "spiritual" experiences they have had. They may have experienced something special in the sunset, or in a flower they saw growing out of the sand, pavement, etc. They are even willing to "channel" past spirits into the present, have their palms read, or the bumps on their head! Many will even bring up "spiritual" experiences and want to share them. We have a friend who was rollerblading in Venice, CA. He stopped to rest and the man on the

bench started to share with him a “spiritual” experience he had had. This was a perfect stranger who wanted to share what had just happened to him. The conversation was cut short by the introduction of Jesus.

Jesus demands a response. It is not our demanding a decision, it is Jesus. He demands a response. If we are honest we in the church have not always had a good reputation; we have often demanded a decision, even engaged in wars to get people to make a decision. Many people have a deep belief in Jesus but stand against the Church. We have an “image” problem. It is not all our making but we must acknowledge and deal with it. Yet, even without the institutional church, Jesus demands a decision.

The Pharisees are not ready for that decision and so they want to keep the crowd silent. To shout Hosanna might mean they agree with what is being said. They are not ready to take sides yet. Let’s keep things quiet and then we don’t have to decide. I am sure you have heard about super-delegates. They are being pressured to make a decision. Neutrality is not what people want to hear—they want a decision. Who are you going to vote for? In essence Jesus demands we make a decision. People seem to understand that. They are not comfortable around Jesus and thus would prefer the silence. If Jesus is not in the mix then no decision is needed. Keep your disciples quiet then we don’t have to decide.

They would wave branches in his honor, they would shout Hosanna, they would dance through the streets of Jerusalem... they did not fully understand what was happening, the full implications of this moment. It did not matter, God was to be praised—if Jesus’ followers were silent even the rocks would cry out. God demands our praise. This is the moment. One group is caught up with the joy and celebration of God coming into the city, the other is embarrassed by the celebration and joy. Whose side are we on? What are we afraid of?