

“THE IN CROWD”

A Sermon by The Rev. Janet L. Abel
Preached on Palm Sunday, April 9, 2017

Lectionary Reading: Matthew 21:1-11

Doing Something a Little Different

Hang on. My little footstool, it was a bit too far ahead. I'm going to step right off it, and that wouldn't be good. Technology. You know how we love it, both Art and I. We're not so great at it, but I do know how to press the button and go to YouTube. I do it every day. I don't know about you, but I wanted to admit this to you before I even try to do this.

I'm going to play you a song because I thought of a song as I was preparing a sermon for Palm Sunday. Why, I'm not sure. It's not my favorite song. It's a song you would never think of. But my sermon title is the title of the song, "The In Crowd." I started the day this morning with the YouTube. I am checking April, the giraffe, every single morning. The last time I checked there were 425,000 people looking at April along with me. So, we're all in this

together, waiting for April to have her baby. You should look, a wonderful thing. I've shown the residents. You like any kind of music, and you can just put your video in. So here we go. Dobie Gray sang this quite a while ago. We might listen to an ad. I can't help that. I have the free version of YouTube.

I Refuse to Pay for It

Never mind that. There's the ad. Okay, here we go. Oh, that's up tight. You see. I'm not good at this. I don't want to listen to Stevie Wonder. I want to listen to Dobie Gray. Okay, we have a flavor of the in crowd. Yes, that came to my mind, and I don't know why, except there is a reason. I'm turning the phone off so it doesn't ring. That would happen if I don't turn it off. I'm going to read you the lyrics; they were a little hard to understand:

"I'm in with the in crowd, I go where the in crowd goes
I'm in with the in crowd and I know what the in crowd knows
Anytime of the year, don't you hear?
Dressing fine, making time
We breeze up and down the street, we get respect from the people we meet
They make way day or night, they know the in crowd is out of sight
I'm in with the in crowd, I know every last dance
When you're in with the in crowd, it's so easy to find romance
Anytime of the year, don't you hear? If it's square, we ain't there
We make every minute count, our share is always the biggest come out
Anytime of the year, don't you hear?"

Spendin' cash, talkin' trash
I'll show you a real good time, come on with me, leave your troubles behind
I don't care where you've been, you ain't been nowhere till you've been in
With the in crowd, with the in crowd, in crowd!"

Were You in the in Crowd?

This song made me think of the Pharisees in Jerusalem, of all things. So I thought of this song right away as I prepared for the sermon this morning for Palm Sunday. Jesus was never really part of the in crowd, was he? I'm not equating myself with him, but neither was I. I know this must be a shock to you.

Think back with me, and we'll see. Let's get nostalgic as we go back in time to elementary school, junior high, and high school. What did it take to be part of the in crowd? And were you part of that bunch? You know, life doesn't really change all that much. I read the advice columns every day, and so often I notice, and people admit this, life in offices, churches, and neighborhoods can have a lot in common with junior high. I sigh, if only I could get out of that.

When I think of junior high in particular, several things come to mind, like gym. I don't know about you, but the whole bit, the outfits, the locker rooms, I try to forget. Not being part of the in crowd, it was really obvious in gym, more so than in math class or English. For example, what made a kid part of the in crowd? It changed as you went ahead in school. I noticed that. But I can tell you far more about what made a kid not being part of the in crowd.

I'm going to start with yo-yos, of all things, which is actually more about sixth grade. But actually, I should start with fourth grade first. We were asked once about our favor-

ite television show in fourth grade. Almost all of the kids said "Starsky and Hutch." Remember "Starsky and Hutch"? A lot of us do. Guess what my favorite show was. I stood up and said, "The Six Wives of Henry the Eighth." That's not a story. I'm not making that up. So obviously my pariah-hood was sealed with that answer. It's a great show, by the way. My classmates looked at me like I was out of my mind.

Wham-O Was the Wrong Yo-Yo

In the sixth grade, you just had to have a yo-yo. I don't know if anyone else remembers this. And it wasn't just any yo-yo. You had to have a Duncan Butterfly yo-yo. So, I told my mother I needed a yo-yo, of course. So even being a pariah, out on the outer fringes of the outer crowd, not just the out crowd, and not just the middle crowd, but the outer crowd, I had to have a yo-yo too.

My mother, God bless her. She never quite got it. She went to the store, and she got me a Wham-O yo-yo. It was Wham-O, it wasn't Duncan, so that made me more of a pariah than not having a yo-yo. How do you explain that if you don't get it, right? So, I thought to myself as I was preparing for the sermon, I'm an adult. I did the magic of Amazon.com. I am now the proud possessor of a Duncan Butterfly yo-yo. I'd do tricks for you, but it's not going well, so I have to put that back. I have to practice some more. I now own one.

In my seventh grade, I went to junior high. And yo-yos were out, obviously. We were junior high students, and clothes became all-important. I remember a whole bunch of things, like shoes. You had to wear work boots for a while. Girls had to wear work boots, and they had to be yellow, right? But they had to be a certain brand, and of course I got the off-brand. They were mustard yellow, not bright yellow, it was obvious.

Levis Are in; Wranglers Are out

Also, you had to wear straight-legged Levis. Cords or jeans were acceptable, but they had to be Levis, right? Of course, I had Wranglers. What else about them? They had to touch the top of your shoes, right? Because what happened if you went to school and your pants are too short. You could see your high waters. All right, we all remember that. Yes, we would laugh at each other. And you never wore them out in the in average crowd if you did, and of course I did.

And then, during my first year in high school, tenth grade, we moved to Cape May, where I spent my last years of high school. A little bit more about that in a minute.

But I received a very important lesson about the in and out crowds in tenth grade. Which I'll never forget. There was a whole bunch of us waiting for the bus, and one of the kids there was a girl who was a cheerleader, and she was most definitely in the in crowd, or so I thought, but I caught a glimpse of somebody who I didn't know that well.

Of course, I didn't know any of them really well, but she was stoned, and she was very unhappy and bitter, and she was talking a blue streak about her parents, about how they didn't get her, about how they didn't

care about her, about how much she hated school, but how much she wanted to die. I'm listening to her, thinking, wait a minute, I thought being part of the in crowd made you happy, successful. What is this, I'm happier, more well-adjusted than this other person, who I thought had it all.

And then I moved to Cape May, and suddenly I was part of the in crowd. Strange, very strange. I was not different in any way. My clothes hadn't changed magically. I was just in a different school, a smaller school, and I was part of the in crowd. In and out, it can move abruptly. It can move in a week, can't it? In five days, everything can change.

Jesus Rides in as an Anti-Hero

And all this does is make me think of Palm Sunday. What was that festive procession all about? Passover. A hundred thousand people, at least in those days, packed into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Good Jewish people went to Jerusalem, to the temple. That's where their faith was centered, and that's why the Roman garrison would move from Caesarea into Jerusalem, along with Pilate, the Roman Procurator, to be there in case there was trouble.

Lots of chaos, lots of people, lots of singing and waving of palms. And of course, Jesus joins this procession as a fulfillment of scripture, as Matthew tells us. He rides in as a sort of anti-hero. Romans riding in their chariots to take the city over; Jesus riding on a donkey in a cloak, obviously making a statement. A statement of a different kind of hero, a different kind of king. And we know the kind of relationship that Jesus has had with the temple leaders. It hasn't been good.

There were a couple of people who have been interested, like Nicodemus, but it was Jesus versus the Pharisees, those are the priests and the Sadducees, the aristocrats, the scribes, the learned scribes of the temple. They all made up the Sanhedrin, the court where Jesus is going to go before in just five days. This is why Jesus knows that something's going to happen, something awful in Jerusalem.

The Tables Are Turned Thrice

It's just not going to go well. He is deliberately confronting the powers that be as he goes into Jerusalem. He is from Galilee, the sticks, not Jerusalem, not the capital, not the temple. He is not credentialed. He has overturned tradition the whole time, and so Matthew tells us, "When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking

'Who is this?' " That word "turmoil" in Greek is an interesting choice, as it actually means "earthquake." The whole city is having an earthquake, moved, and it's used twice more in this gospel.

The world and the city will quake again when Jesus bows his head and dies on Good Friday, and then, on Easter morning when Jesus is resurrected. This is major, this is a massive upheaval. The tables are really getting turned. The last is first, and the first is last. The in crowd is out, and the out crowd is in. We all know the shouts and the songs and the psalms of the crowd are going to change completely to "crucify him" in just five days. The upheaval has begun, and the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

Amen.