

***CRIBB<S>NOTE – APRIL 5, 2009***

Everybody who is standing beside you is not necessarily with you. That is a lesson I learned in my youth during one of many protests against the American war in Vietnam. While standing outside the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles among a crowd of demonstrators, everybody who was there shouting, marching, and protesting the war did not have the same motives.

It was 1968 and the war was escalating to levels of great carnage and destruction. Yet, there were people along the protest lines who felt more aggression was needed and that the United States was fighting only half-heartedly. In their words, “We needed to bomb the h - - out of Hanoi.” Other protesters believed the war should have ended and American troops brought home immediately. It was abundantly clear we were not all on the same page with the same purpose for opposing the Vietnam War.

When Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem, he heard the roar of crowds enthusiastically hailing him as their leader:

*“Hosanna! Blessed is the one  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Blessed is the coming kingdom  
of our ancestor David!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

No doubt it was a glorious moment; a great day. It was a time of celebration and excitement. We can only imagine how the twelve disciples felt as their leader was received by the people in the great city.

After three years of ministry in which the sick were ill, the lame began to walk, the blind received sight, and even some dead people came back to life, the reception at Jerusalem had to have seemed like everything was falling into place. There may have been at least a couple of Jesus’ followers who thought about their own future; perhaps they would become famous and popular as well.

The story takes a radically turn when the cheering crowds transformed into a jeering mob before the end of the week.

Everybody who stands beside you is not necessarily with you. Worse, they could actually be against you. In the case of Jesus, at least one of his trusted associates became his betrayer. Some in the crowd, who welcomed Jesus with shouts of joy, joined the chorus who demanded his death.

How far have we come? Those of us who confess ‘Jesus as Lord’, do we walk in his steps and follow his ways? Where do we stand in the Great Movement to bring God’s realm to earth? Do we see ourselves in the story that leads to Easter?

We are very fortunate to be alive in these days. We have numerous opportunities to practice our faith and to embody God’s love and mercy. These are times in which people are looking for more than superficial episodes. They want to know God cares for them and that the people of God have compassion.

Jesus demonstrated his commitment to nonviolence by refusing to return evil for evil or violence for violence. Even as he was falsely accused, stripped, whipped, mocked, and executed, he never allowed himself to react in kind. He showed the world a better way; a way of peace and nonviolence. Is that our way? Can we live today without violence?

We walk in the light of Christ. We are called the ‘people of God’ because of our commitment to wage peace and not condone, justify, or engage in acts of war and violence. Jesus has shown us how to live and see the ‘loving image of God’ in each person. Where do stand and who is standing with us?