



# FROM THE PULPIT

## *North Shore Congregational Church*

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### ***“What Gets Your Attention?”***

**Rev. Dr. Martin W. Hall – Preaching**

*John 13: 1-17; Luke 19: 28-40*

*March 25, 2018 – Palm Sunday*

Over the past few years, as our children have grown, we have become increasingly familiar with our culture’s capacity to fabricate fame. Whether it’s actors and actresses, singers, bands, athletes, or something else, we have a remarkable ability, in our society, to manufacture a famous person. The strategies vary. Sometimes it’s done by putting the person in television shows that feed a music career. Sometimes it’s the opposite. Sometimes it’s the release some sort of controversial video or rumor that gets the world talking about that individual (and it doesn’t always matter if the talk is good or bad). And, sometimes it’s something else altogether. But, the result is almost always the same – the media begins to pick up the stories, the social media bonanza begins, the posters start showing up on store shelves, the pictures begin to adorn the magazine racks, the pundits start their gabbing, and the next thing you know, you have a superstar.

Disney, Nickelodeon, Fox, NBC Universal, Warner Music, Sony, the list goes on and on. They all have their strategies – they all have their goals – but each and every one of them has this uncanny ability to pluck someone out of nowhere, launch a few targeted PR campaigns, and turn the girl the next door into the girl everyone wants to meet, everyone wants to know, and everyone wants to be. Before you know it, movie sales are going through the roof, concerts are booked up, lines are around the corner for the chance to take a picture with them at that event they’re hosting, and reporters are flocking to them on the red carpets.

But, here’s the remarkable thing. All that fame – all that press – all that adoration from fans and the public, more often than not, has absolutely nothing to do with what they really bring to the table. Don’t get me wrong, some of these people, many of them, are extraordinarily talented. But, the reactions our girls have when they hear Shawn Mendes or Zendaya on the radio is not because these are exemplary musicians who bring paradigm shattering talents and gifts to their music. The reaction our girls have, to these individuals, is because their producers have created this image and persona of fame to which almost every 8-13 year-old girl is going to subscribe. And, so that we don’t pass it off as simply a childhood reality, the constant attention that is given to the Kim Kardashian’s and Derek Jeter’s of the world is not because these people have

somehow brought life-altering blessings to our society – it’s because they are famous. And, in some cases, they are famous for being famous!

Think about it. How many of us could name three winners from this year’s academy awards? How about from the Chicago Cubs championship team in 2016? How many of us could name five actors who appeared in major films last year? Now, how many of us could name a single scientist who has offered a major breakthrough in medical research any time in the last 10 years? How many of us could name a single Nobel Laureate in the last five?

Now, I don’t want to belabor this, but my point, in all of this, is that we are a society that ever-increasingly devotes our attention to that which is calling for our attention. As though we’re walking down Times Square being drawn in by every flashing light and neon sign screaming ‘look at me,’ we invest more and more of our interest and energy in those things that are trying to get our interest and energy. If it’s got a million hits on YouTube, we want to watch it. If it’s being shared by dozens of our friends on Facebook, we want to see it. And, if it’s a worldwide trending topic on Twitter, we want to talk about it. Whether we are talking about Clark Gable or Kelly Clarkson, generation after generation seems to increasingly devote itself to the fame and infamy to which our culture’s shapers want us to be devoted. All the while, our attention is not shaped by the meaning, purpose and character of those we follow, but by the flashing lights and neon signs that tell us how interested we should be.

And, that’s what really stood out to me about Jesus, this year, in this story of the Triumphal Entry.

- This is a man who should have been ridden into Jerusalem on a camel, ushered into Jerusalem on the fanciest of chariots, or carried into Jerusalem on the shoulders of his Disciples.
- This is a man who should have been served, glorified, emulated, escalated and celebrated for all he was, all he did, and all he sought to be in the lives of these people.
- This was the man who, above all people of all times, had the right to call for that glory, esteem and privilege in this world.
- This was the man who had every right to have the neon signs, the flashing lights, the Twitter feeds, and everything else we use to draw attention to people.

But, this was a man who claimed none of it!

He didn’t live his life with privilege. He didn’t work to call for popularity. He didn’t enter Jerusalem with pomp and circumstance. No, he knelt at the feet his disciples and washed the feet of those who, in truth, should have been washing his. He took the lowliest and most despised of the world and made them his friends. And, then he climbed on the back of an ordinary farm animal he grabbed from the post of some simple farmer on the edge of town, to ride into Jerusalem. We live in a culture that is frighteningly adept at creating fame by calling for fame, and frighteningly ready to devote itself to those who are calling for our attention. But, today, we remember the story of the one so humble, so devoted to serving others, so committed to sharing God’s love in selfless ways, that he set all of that claim to fame aside and entered the city on the back of a colt.

And, you know what? People cheered anyway. They gathered on the streets, they laid their cloaks on the ground, they waved their palms, sang their ‘hosannas,’ and shouted at the top of their lungs, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ And, they did it not because of his shrewd PR team, not because of some magnificent marketing strategy, and not because of his concerted efforts to gather people to feed his ego. No, they did it because, when confronted with the true magnificence and glory of who and what this man was, there was simply no choice but to cry out in praise.

“37 When Jesus came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives,” the Gospel according to Luke tells us, “the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” 40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

What a concept! “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” That’s the majesty of the one who came into Jerusalem that day. That’s the glory of the one whose sacrifice and love we will celebrate and remember this week. That’s the miracle of the profound life and presence of Jesus Christ. That his love was so great, his grace so wonderful, his presence so magnificent, that even if the people had managed to stay quiet, the very creation itself would cry out in praise and celebration of the one who entered Jerusalem on his way to the cross.

We are a society that is increasingly drawn to those things our culture’s shapers tell us we should be drawn to. We are society that is compelled by the neon signs and the flashing lights that pull us to celebrating those people other’s want us to celebrate. We are a society that can create fame in a heartbeat with very little consideration of whether or not there is any reason for that individual to be celebrated.

But, this week, we remember the one who is better known than them all. This week, we remember the one whose name has been known, around the world, for 2,000 years. This week, we remember the one who didn’t use a PR team, a marketing strategy or a spin doctor to get his name in lights. This week, we remember the one whose character was so profound that he could take the role of the servant, embrace the humility of riding on a simple colt, and still line the streets with those who just wanted to celebrate him. This week, we remember the one whose love was so great, whose grace was so wonderful, whose presence was so magnificent, that it even if the people managed to be quiet, the very creation itself would have cried out in praise.

So, as we head into this holiest of weeks. As we move towards the table and remember the cross. As we reflect on the sacrifice of our Lord and rejoice in the wonder and majesty of the empty tomb. Ask yourself who will get your attention. Ask yourself who will get your time. Ask yourself who will get your praise. Will it be the ones our culture keeps telling you to watch, to celebrate, to follow, and to praise? Or, will it be the one whose love was so great, whose life was so full of meaning and purpose, that even if we do overlook him, the very creation will cry in rejoicing?